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MARY ASTELL

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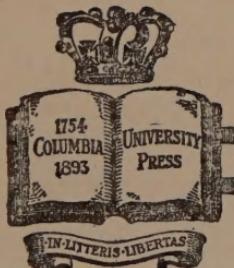
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TO
MY FATHER
AND MY MOTHER

This Monograph has been approved by the Department of English and Comparative Literature in Columbia University as a contribution to knowledge worthy of publication.

A. H. THORNDIKE,
Executive Officer.

PREFACE

THE aim of the following study is to formulate some of the seventeenth and eighteenth century ideals for the education of women as they presented themselves to a woman of the period, and conversely to show how her statement of them re-acted upon the thought of the time. I wish to thank the custodians and librarians from whom material has been obtained, especially those of Columbia University, Union Theological Seminary, the New York Public Library, and the British Museum, as well as all persons who have answered questions and otherwise facilitated my work. I wish also to express my gratitude to the Columbia professors who have aided me, to Professor Jefferson B. Fletcher for helpful suggestions, and to Professor Carl Van Doren and Professor Charles S. Baldwin for reading my manuscript. Greatest of all is my debt to Professor William P. Trent, who first suggested the topic to me, and whose continued interest has helped to make the study to me at least a living thing.

In consequence of my absence from the country while the book has been passing through the press, I have been obliged to rely for assistance in correcting the proofs upon several persons to whom my thanks are due — notably Mr. M. M. Hoover. In some cases it has been impracticable to compare the citations with the text of the first editions, but it is believed that, except for slight modernization, the quotations represent the originals with substantial accuracy.

F. M. S.

May 15, 1915

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MARY ASTELL

CHAPTER I BIOGRAPHY

IN its development of social and intellectual ideals society has often not recognized its own progress. At some later time the student tracing the evolution of ideas finds them latent in the social mind but expressed in single individuals who, at first sight, seem to stand out from their contemporaries as intellectual "sports," but prove merely to be advance spokesmen of ideals already forming in the race consciousness. Such was the position held by Mary Astell in the growth of the idea of education for women during the seventeenth century. She gave utterance to thoughts that had been developing through the century, but related them to life more concretely than her associates had done. Yet because the time was not ripe, one hundred and fifty years passed before her plans were carried into execution.

The facts of her early life have been practically lost. Ballard¹ has preserved in *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* most of these available, although his material is too often based upon rumor. The later encyclopedic accounts follow his work and repeat his errors, in many cases amplifying them.

¹ George Ballard, 1705-1755. An antiquarian who studied and wrote at Oxford. In 1752 he published the book named above.

The first authentic record in Mary Astell's history occurs in the baptismal book of the quaint little Church of St. John's at Newcastle-on-Tyne: "Mary Astell 12. Nov. 1666. daughter of Mr. Astell."² In the same record is the register of the marriage of her parents, Peter Astell and Mary Errington, on October 31, 1665. There were two other children, William, who died in infancy, and Peter, a lawyer, who lived in Newcastle until his death, January 2, 1710-11.

The Astell and the Errington families to which her parents belonged, were prominent in the commercial affairs of Newcastle, and it is in the hostmen records that the chief account of Peter Astell occurs. At this time the hostmen at Newcastle held the monopoly of coal and grindstones, two products of the city not already taken over by the trading guilds. To the hostmen was assigned the duty of entertaining merchant strangers, of becoming answerable for their peaceable conduct, and of supervising their sales. In return for this service to the city, the guild was given the right to furnish its guests with such supplies as were not the monopolies of any regular guild in the city.³

On May 11, 1653, Peter Astell, son of William Astell of Newcastle, gentleman, was enrolled under George Dawson as Master.⁴ Mr. Dawson had been admitted hostman in 1646.⁵ In 1655 he was Collector of the Custom House, and in September of the same year an order was given and recorded on the 19th that the tax on grindstones

² Church Records. St. John's Church, Newcastle.

³ *Extracts from the Records of the Company of Hostmen of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.* Pub. of Surtees Society, Vol. 105, Edinburgh, 1901. Introduction.

⁴ *Hostmen Records*, p. 285.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

should be paid into the Custom House, and should "be there collected and received by Peter Astell, servant unto Mr. George Dawson, Alderman, Collector there."⁶ From that time on Peter Astell's name appears frequently in the list. Six years later, with two others, he is given full power to distrain goods of persons indebted to the company.⁷ The regular fee for his office seems to have been three pounds, six shillings and eight pence, with two pounds and twelve or thirteen shillings for collecting the tax on grindstones. Although for some years Peter Astell had been acting as clerk of the company, he was not admitted hostman until February 26, 1673-4.⁸ Four years later he died and was buried March 16, 1677-8 in the chancel of St. John's Church. The record for many years hidden by the re-flooring of the Church, but preserved by Brand, the Newcastle historian, reads as follows:

"Here lies interred the body of Peter Astell, gentleman: he departed this life 19th March 1678, and had issue by Mary his wife two sons and a daughter. William his son departed this life 15 March 1672."⁹

The hostmen on July 25, 1678, elected a new clerk and "to old Mrs. Astell" the Company ordered "3 6s. 8p. dureing the Companies pleasure."¹⁰ In January of the next year appears¹¹ a record of the payment of one half of this.

Further information concerning the family appears in the record of the interment of Mrs. Astell October 16,

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 249, 250, 271.

⁹ John Brand, *History and Antiquities of the Town and County of Newcastle-upon-Tyne*. 2 vols. Vol. 1, p. 114.

¹⁰ *Hostmen Records*, p. 138.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

1684. Tradition relates that Mary Astell left for London when she was about twenty years of age; it was probably the breaking up of the home through her mother's death that brought about the change.¹²

The exact relationship of Peter Astell's branch of the family to other Astells mentioned in the church books is not always clear. In 1625 there appears in the *St. John's Register* the record of the birth of a daughter to a Mr. William Astell, followed by the records of the births of several other children: Isaac, May 3, 1627, Thomas, March 19, 1628-9 and Rudolph, November 2, 1631. There is no account of the birth of Peter Astell, the father of Mary, but, as he was the son of William Astell, gentleman, according to the hostmen's records, his position as son of William Astell, under sheriff of Newcastle, seems fairly clear, thus making Mary Astell the granddaughter of a royalist whom, however, she knew by tradition only, as he died in 1658. The curious old record on William's tombstone, blurred though it was when Brand made his copy, pays enduring tribute to his loyalty to his king and to his religion.

"Exuviae Gulielme Astell . . . sub die . . . resurrectionis spe Fideliter his custodiendas Lubens depositus . . . Sept. 14 A° Domini MDCL . . . III Iterumque die illo magno . . . crucis. Hinc eum gaudia petendae.

Gloriosi induet immortalitatem."¹³

This is followed by some English verses with strange figures and halting meter, yet giving a picture of a noble character.

¹² Miss Hope Dodds of Newcastle concludes that this Mrs. Astell is the mother, not the wife, of Peter Astell. The decision rests upon the interpretation of the term *old*.

¹³ Brand, Vol. II, p. 190.

“Stay, reader, stay, who wouldst but cannot buy
Choice books come read the churches library
Which like Sybeline leaves here scatter'd flies
Perus'd alas here by men's feet that lies
In single sheets, then neatly to be bound,
By God's own hand, when the last trump shall sound;
Amongst the rest glance on this marble leaf,
'Tis Astell's title page and therefore brief,
Here lies the reliques of a man
But who was truly Christian
Whose sounder judgment, frantic zeal,
Never hurried on her wheel
Of Giddy error, whose heart bled
When rebel feet cut off their head.
And great good Shepherd humbly lay,
To his mad flock a bleeding prey.
Who cheerfully sustain'd the loss,
Of all for his dread master's cross.
Triumphant Charles he's gone to see
For militant praise heav'ns victory.”

Equally interesting is Ralph Astell, A.M., curate of St. Nicholas in 1667. Brand suggests him as the uncle to whom tradition ascribes the education of Mary Astell,¹⁴ but, as he died when she was but thirteen, she can hardly have received from him the full education with which she has been credited.¹⁵ Moreover, his character was not above reproach, as he was suspended from his curacy December 17, 1677. The church books of Gateshead record, “One pint of sack when Mr. Astell preached 1s. 2d.” Like William Astell he was a strong loyalist. At the restoration of Charles II he voiced Newcastle's joy at the happy event in a manner unique if not poetical. In his poem, *Vota non Bella*, Newcastle is represented as

¹⁴ Brand, Vol. I, p. 85.

¹⁵ Richard Welford, *Men of Mark Twixt Tyne and Tweed*, London, 1895, 3 vols. Vol. I, p. 122.

a "black northern lass" approaching to celebrate the return of Charles II to his rightful throne.¹⁶ She comes more simply arrayed than others with "no poweder or scents to ornament her," "save Coale-duste-powder," and greets him with the words,

"Venus herself is proud of her brown Mole,
I have my spot, too, 'tis a good round Cole.
This sets me off and makes me Penny-fair:
White Swans are common but a Black one rare."

Still other Astells in the Newcastle records of the century were a Mr. John Astell, lawyer, who was buried March 20, 1633-4, and a Thomas Astell, B.A., vicar at Milford in 1621, and at Haltwhistle from 1623-4 to 1633.

If traces of heredity can be trusted, Mary Astell's family provided the ideals and the characteristics that developed strongly in her later. There were traditions of loyalty to the church and to the king, an educational ideal, and the business astuteness that made Peter Astell successful as a hostman.

It is to be regretted that no record of the young woman's education is preserved. Ballard and succeeding biographers speak of her as learned in the classic languages, and this was current among her later admirers. Henry Dodwellview in writing to her did not translate his Greek quotations because he thought she might understand the original.¹⁷ Her own statement of her knowledge is more humble. "My Ignorance in the Sacred Languages, besides all other disadvantages makes me incapable of expounding Scriptures with the Learned."¹⁸ Ballard certainly misinterpreted the passage in her works from which he drew the

¹⁶ *Vota non Bella*, Gateshead, 1660, pp. 4-5.

¹⁷ Rawlinson MS., D. 198 : 104. [Bodleian]

¹⁸ *Christian Religion*, p. 139.

idea that she had mastered Plato, Hierocles, Plutarch, Epictetus, Tully, and Seneca. She was enumerating names, and assuming a hypothetical knowledge to prove man's faith in what he did not himself know.¹⁹ Although she had some knowledge of French, it seems to have been a late acquisition. In *An Enquiry after Wit*, French phrases are frequent, but are used in the manner of a beginner in the language who desires to practice a newly acquired knowledge. In other respects her education is rather that of a wide reader than of one who had received close training from childhood.

Soon after her mother's death in 1684 Mary Astell, as has been noted, seems to have left Newcastle for London. When she settled at Chelsea cannot be discovered at this late day, but by 1695, at the time the *Letters Concerning the Love of God* were written, she was well enough acquainted with the character of her Chelsea neighbors to dedicate the volume to Lady Catherine Jones. The first mention of her residence appears in the tax records of Chelsea, under the date of the records commencing March 25, 1712, where Madam Astell is listed as paying fifteen shillings poor rate on her property in Robinson's Lane. The next year the rate is given as seven shillings, six pence; then the record disappears. In the entries for the last half year of 1715, Madam "Ashtell," residing *By the Swan* is recorded as paying nine pence tax. By 1719 the street has assumed the more dignified title of Swan Walk, but the entry reads "14 Madam Astell empt . . ." The residence on Swan Walk is the one given to Mary Astell by Mr. Blount in *Paradise Row*.²⁰

During this period Mary Astell's prosperity can be judged somewhat by the tax rate. In the rate list of 1715,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁰ Reginald Blount, *Paradise Row*, London, 1906, p. 65.

Michaelmas to February of the year when she is first represented as *By the Swan*, her rate is nine shillings, sixpence; Lady Catherine Jones in Jews' Row was paying four pounds; the highest rate was paid by the Duke of Beaufort, five pounds; and the lowest, one shilling, four pence, by several.²¹

There are but few accounts of Mary Astell's later residence in Chelsea. After the death of the Earl of Ranelagh in 1711, his daughter, Lady Catherine Jones, offered for sale his place "Near the College." In 1716 Lady Catherine is rated under the street Jews' Row where she continues to live until after Mary Astell's death, although at exactly that time in the tax rate for February 18, 1730-1, her house is listed as empty. A letter from Thomas Birch to Ballard states that Mary Astell lived with Lady Catherine Jones in Chelsea.²² One more possible trace of residence occurs in a letter from Mary Astell to Sir Hans Sloane dated April 25, 1724, from Manor Street.²³

The generally accepted traditions as to Mary Astell's life, colored probably by her later ill-health, and by some humorous attacks on her, report her as a recluse; on the contrary, she took a part in the life of Chelsea. Her most intimate friend seems to have been Lady Catherine Jones, through whom she must have met many people who would otherwise have been outside the social group of a woman interested primarily in serious things. Lady Catherine was sufficiently prominent in court circles for King George I to be entertained by her at Ranelagh Gardens in 1715. Her youthful sincerity and earnestness are praised by Mary Astell in the dedication to *Letters Concerning the Love of God*, but, in spite of the fulsomeness

²¹ *Poor Rate Books of Chelsea, 1707-1731.*

²² Ballard MS., 37 : 49. [Bodleian.]

²³ Sloane MS., 4047 : 163. [British Museum.]

of contemporary dedications, the truth is not over-stated. At her father's death in 1711, Lady Catherine and her two married sisters petitioned Parliament for the right to sell their estate for the payment of their father's debts, contracted while he was Paymaster General of the Navy.²⁴ The petition was granted, and Lady Catherine Jones moved from her home in Ranelagh Gardens to a less pretentious house in Jews' Row.

Her strong moral character, developed in spite of wealth and social position, endeared her to Mary Astell, who looked upon her as giving promise of what any woman might attain. In *The Christian Religion*, also dedicated to Lady Catherine, Mary Astell, in showing how much good can be done with money rightly used, undoubtedly has in mind the beneficences of her young friend. The close relations between the two lasted until the elder woman's death.

As an observer, Mary Astell saw the court life as it touched her Chelsea associates; the Duchess of Mazarine was her near neighbor, and she secured, at first hand, her knowledge of the need of a change in the lives of women. As her reputation extended, her acquaintance widened. She dined at the home of Dean Atterbury as a friend of his wife, and argued with him concerning his religious theories. In fact, she seems to have become somewhat of a local celebrity and her house to have taken the tone of a salon, as Ralph Thoresby indicates in his account of a call made on her during a visit to London.

"Walked to Mr. Boulter's at Chelsea, who was come in the meantime to visit me: but met opportunely with the obliging Mr. Croft, the minister, who introduced me to the celebrated Mrs. Astell, who has printed many pious and curious tracts, and is the same lady who corresponded

²⁴ Commons Journals, Vol. XVIII, pp. 529, 663; XXI, p. 460.

with Mr. Norris about Divine Love."²⁵ In later years she knew Lord and Lady Huntingdon of Chelsea, and with her friends called upon Sir Hans Sloane to see his curiosities, and to get his judgment upon some of her own curios.

A circle of women of like interests grew up about her. With Elizabeth Elstob, the Anglo-Saxon scholar, she had an intimate acquaintance, probably gained, or at least cemented, during the latter's residence in London between 1709 and 1715. The fruits of this friendship remain in the correspondence of Ballard with Elizabeth Elstob, when he was attempting to secure material for Mary Astell's biography.

Lady Anne Coventry of Smithfield, possibly the Emilia of the *Spectator*, a woman of charitable temper and religious life,²⁶ and author of *Meditations and Reflections Moral and Divine*, 1707, was interested in Mary Astell's plans, as were several unnamed friends.

But the choicest of all her friends was Lady Elizabeth Hastings, who entered fully into her ideas and contributed liberally to the charity school at Chelsea. On the death of Lady Betty's father Theophilus, seventh Earl of Huntingdon, his brother George had succeeded to the family estates of Ledstone Park, Yorkshire. At his death, February 22, 1704-5, the estate came to Lady Betty. From her mother also, she had inherited money. Seriously and conscientiously she went to work to discover the best means of using her property rightly and in her successful disbursement of it she became a prototype of the wisely generous women of to-day.

During some of Lady Betty's winters in London she came into contact with Mary Astell, although the acquaintance was not formed as early as is thought by those who ascribe to her the promise of £10,000 for Mary Astell's

²⁵ *Diary of Ralph Thoresby*, London, 1830, 2 vols. Vol. II, p. 161.

²⁶ *The Spectator*, Feb. 15, 1712. No. 302.

college for women, since they were not personally acquainted when *The Serious Proposal* was published.²⁷ The friendship between the two women lasted through Mary Astell's life, and it is in a letter from Lady Catherine Jones to Lady Betty that the sole extant account of Mary Astell's death occurs.

Unfortunately Lady Betty destroyed all her manuscripts before her death,²⁸ so that no trace remains of a correspondence between the two that must have been delightfully sympathetic. The young woman whom to love was a liberal education,²⁹ whose regard for friendship was sacred, whose sense of honor was strict to the last degree, and whose modesty and humility were so great that she could not bear to be praised for her good qualities,³⁰ was deeply cherished by the austere woman in search of the best development of her friends.

Of the women of Mary Astell's acquaintance Lady Mary Montagu is the most famous. Just when they met is uncertain, but Lady Mary visited in Chelsea. Lady Cheyne of Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, was an aunt of hers, although the relationship was somewhat strained; in her girlhood, Lady Mary evidently knew Lady Ranelagh, Lady Catherine Jones's mother, for Wortley Montagu wrote to her before their marriage:

"But how can I speak with you there without observation? Do you never walk in the Queen's Gardens or Lady Ranelagh's?"³¹

²⁷ *Enquiry after Wit*, 1722. Preface.

²⁸ The Reverend Charles Hastings Medhurst of Leeds, relative and present executor of Lady Betty's charities, is authority for this statement.

²⁹ *Tatler*, No. 49. July, 1709.

³⁰ *Gentleman's Magazine*. Vol. 10, p. 36. January, 1740.

³¹ "George Paston," *Lady Mary Montagu and her Times*. 1907. p. 124.

As a young girl Lady Mary seems to have been fascinated by the intellectual power and the high ideas of Mary Astell, who attempted then, as later, to turn the brilliant young woman to religious thoughts. A first edition of *The Serious Proposal*, now in the British Museum, was presented to Lady Mary by Mary Astell and bears an inscription to her in the author's own hand. The book made a strong impression on Lady Mary. Fifty years later, toward the close of her wandering life, she wrote to her daughter Lady Bute that her early ideal had been to found such a school as Mary Astell had suggested. She said, "It was a favorite scheme of mine, when I was fifteen, and had I then been mistress of an independent fortune, I should certainly have elected myself Lady Abbess. Then would you and your children have been lost forever."³² In spite of their diametrically opposed habits of thought and social ideals, Mary Astell on her part was attracted by Lady Mary, who seemed to her an illustration of the brilliancy which she claimed for women, and she rejoiced in her friend's mental power. Perhaps there was in her mind a half-formed hope of being able to save the young woman from some of the pitfalls into which her erratic genius was already leading her.

In the mass of anecdotes centering around Lady Mary Montagu, there is difficulty in separating the true from the false, especially when many of them come with the authority of her family behind them. For example, Mary Astell has been credited by "George Paston" with having written the eulogistic article in *The Plain Dealer* concerning Lady Mary's achievement in introducing inoculation into England.³³ On the score of mere style the ascription might

³² *Letters and Works* [edited by Lord Wharncliffe. With a memoir by M. Moy Thomas] 1893, 2 vols. Vol. II, p. 300.

³³ "Paston," *Life*, pp. 305-307.

pass, but Aaron Hill, we now know, has to be given the credit for this particular glorification of the famous traveller.³⁴

Although Lady Mary's Turkish letters were not intended for publication, several copies were made for her friends. In 1724 a preface signed "M. A." was written for the collection and in 1725 a poem was added. The letters with the preface were published without authorization in 1763, but, according to Mr. Dallaway's memoirs of Lady Mary, the preface had [later] received her authorization, although Mr. Dallaway himself gives the incorrect date. He says, "Another copy of them [the letters] but not in her own handwriting Lady Mary had given to Mr. Molesworth, which is now in possession of the Marquis of Bute. Both in the original manuscript and in the last mentioned manuscript the preface printed by Becket is inserted, written in 1728 by a lady of quality. It is given in this edition as having at least been approved by her ladyship."³⁵ This preface, showing as it does the spirit and character of Mary Astell's mature judgment, is worth quoting entire:

"I was going, like common editors to advertise the reader of the beauties and excellencies of the work laid before him: To tell him that the illustrious author had opportunities, that other travellers, whatever their quality or curiosity may have been, cannot obtain; and a genius capable of making the best improvement of every opportunity. But if the reader, after perusing *one* letter only, has not discernment to distinguish that natural elegance, that delicacy of sentiment and observation, that easy gracefulness, and lively simplicity (which is the perfection of writing) and in which these *Letters* exceed all that have

³⁴ Dorothy Brewster, *Aaron Hill*, New York, 1913, p. 159.

³⁵ *Works*. [Edited with memoir by James Dallaway]. 1803, 5 vols. Vol. I, p. XX.

appeared in this kind, or almost in any other, let him lay the book down, and leave it to those who have. . . .

“There is not anything so excellent, but some will carp at it, and the rather, because of its excellency. But to such hypercritics, I shall only say . . . I confess, I am malicious enough to desire, that the world should see, to how much better purpose the LADIES travel than their LORDS; and that, whilst it is surfeited with *Male-Travels*, all in the same tone, and stuft with the same trifles; a lady has the skill to strike out a new path, and to embellish a wornout subject, with variety of fresh and elegant entertainment. For besides the vivacity and spirit which enlivens every part, and that inimitable beauty which spreads through the whole; besides the purity of the style, for which it may be justly accounted the standard of the English tongue; the reader will find a more true and accurate account of the customs and manners of the several nations, with whom this lady conversed, than he can in any other author. But as her ladyship’s penetration discovers the inmost follies of the heart, so the candour of her temper passed over them with an air of pity rather than reproach; treating with the politeness of a court, and the gentleness of a lady, what the severity of her judgment could not but condemn.

“In short, let her own sex at least, do her justice, lay aside diabolical Envy, and its *Brother* Malice, with all their accursed company, sly whispering, cruel back-biting, spiteful detraction, and the rest of that hideous crew, which I hope are very falsely said to attend the *Tea Table*, being more apt to think they frequent those public places where virtuous women never come. Let the men malign one another, if they think fit, and strive to pull down merit when they cannot equal it. Let us be better natured, than to give way to any unkind or disrespectful thought of so

bright an ornament of our sex, merely because she has better sense; for I doubt not but our hearts will tell us, that this is the real and pardonable offense, whatever may be pretended. Let us be better Christians, than to look upon her with an evil eye, only because the giver of all good gifts has entrusted and adorned her with the most excellent talents. Rather let us freely own the superiority of this sublime genius, as I do in the sincerity of my soul, pleased that a *woman* triumphs, and proud to follow in her train. Let us offer her the palm which is so justly her due: and if we pretend to any laurels, lay them willingly at her feet.

December 18,
1724.

M. A.

“Charm’d into love of what obscures my fame,
If I had wit, I’d celebrate her name,
And all the beauties of her mind proclaim.
Till malice deafen’d with the mighty sound,
It’s ill-concerted calumnies confound;
Let fall the mask, and with pale Envy meet,
To ask, and find, their pardon, at her feet.

May 31, 1725.”³⁶

Mr. Cleland, the editor, cannot resist one of the comments to which Mary Astell in her lifetime was often subject. “This fair and elegant prefacer has resolved,” he says, “that Malice should be of the Masculine gender. I believe it is both masculine and feminine, and I heartily wish it were neuter.”³⁷ Lady Louisa Stuart, granddaughter of Lady Mary, in her introductory anecdotes to Lady Mary’s Life, speaks of this note in a way that gives a clew not only to Mary Astell’s spirit, but to her personal appearance as well. “This fair and elegant lady of qual-

³⁶ *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M—W—y M—e.* New York, 1766, pp. V-IX.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. VII, note.

ity," according to Lady Louisa Stuart, "was no less a person than Mistress Mary Astell, of learned memory, the Madonella of the *Tatler*, a very pious, exemplary woman, and a profound scholar, but as far from fair and elegant as any old school-master of her time: in outward form, indeed, rather ill-favored and forbidding, and of a humor to have repulsed the compliment roughly, had it been paid her while she lived."³⁸

Lady Louisa Stuart is also authority for the statement that Lady Mary's commonplace book of material collected before 1730 contained a poem *Of Friendship* presented to Lady Mary by Mary Astell and according to Lady Louisa, written by her.³⁹ The same poem is mentioned in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* under the year 1743, as having appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in somewhat different form, with Boswell's single comment that it was an early poem of Johnson's.⁴⁰

Some lines seem especially appropriate to express Mary Astell's friendship for her younger friend.

"Friendship! peculiar gift of Heav'n,
The noble mind's delight and pride.
To Wortley and to angels giv'n,
To all the lower world denied:

While Love, unknown among the blest,
Parent of rage and hot desire,
The human and the savage breast
Inflames alike, with equal fire.

With bright but oft destructive gleam
Alike o'er all his lightenings fly;

³⁸ *Letters and Works*. [Edited by Lord Wharncliffe] 1837, 3 vols. Vol. I, pp. 49-50.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

⁴⁰ Proof as to its authorship is lacking. Miss Symonds ("George Pastons") found no trace of it in Lady Mary's manuscripts.

Thy lambent glories only beam
Around the fav'rites of the sky.

Thy gentle flow of guiltless joys
On fools and villains ne'er descend.
In vain for thee the monarch sighs
Who hugs a flatt'rer for a friend.

When virtues, kindred virtues meet,
And sister-souls together join,
Thy pleasures, lasting as they're sweet,
Are all transporting, all divine.

Oh! may this flame ne'er cease to glow
Till you to happier seats remove!
What raised your virtue here below
Shall aid your happiness above.”⁴¹

The verses *To Clio, occasioned by her verses on Friendship*, although not given in the Wharncliffe edition of Lady Mary's works, appeared in the 1766 and 1811 editions as by Lady Mary, and are so ascribed in the latest biography.⁴² The heading suggests them as a reply to the foregoing ode *On Friendship*. Unfortunately they appear undated in all editions.

While, Clio, pondering o'er thy lines I roll,
Dwell on each thought and meditate thy soul,
Methinks I view thee in some calm retreat,
Far from all guilt, distraction, and deceit;
Thence pitying view the thoughtless fair and gay,
Who whirl their lives in giddiness away,
Thence greatly scorning what the world calls great,
Contemn the proud, their tumults, power, and state,
And deem it thence inglorious to descend
For aught below but virtue and a friend.

⁴¹ *Letters and Works* [Wharncliffe ed.] 1837. Vol. I. Introductory Anecdotes, pp. 53-54.

⁴² “Paston,” *Life*, p. 548.

How com'st thou fram'd, so different from thy sex,
 Whom trifles ravish, and whom trifles vex?
 Capricious things, all flutter, whim, and show,
 And light and varying as the winds that blow;
 To candour, sense, to love, to friendship blind,
 To flatterers, fools, and coxcombs only kind!
 Say whence those hints, those bright ideas came,
 That warm thy breast with friendship's holy flame,
 That close thy heart against the joys of youth,
 And ope thy mind to all the rays of truth,
 That with such sweetness and such grace unite
 The gay, the prudent, virtuous and polite?
 As heaven inspires thy sentiment divine,
 May heaven vouchsafe a friendship worthy thine;
 A friendship plac'd where ease and fragrance reign,
 Where nature sways us and no laws restrain,
 Where studious leisure, prospects unconfin'd,
 And heavenly musing, lift th' aspiring mind.
 There with thy friend, may years on years be spent,
 In blooming health, and ever gay content;
 There soothe the passions, there unfold your hearts,
 Join in each wish, and warming into love,
 Approach the raptures of the blest above.”⁴³

The friendship between the two women continued until Mary Astell's death in 1731. She seems to have attempted to turn Lady Mary's attention from the vanities of the world to matters of more serious importance to herself. One of the conversations reported by Lady Louisa Stuart concerned immortality, of the truth of which Mary Astell was trying to convince her friend.⁴⁴

As late as 1753 Lady Mary wrote a letter from Italy that showed how Mary Astell's theories, tempered by her own experiences, were still vital in her thought. In replying to compliments paid her books in Italy, she had merely laughed when she said, “. . . the character of a learned

⁴³ *Letters and Works.* [Thomas ed.] 1887, 2 vols. Vol. II, p. 524.

⁴⁴ *Letters and Works.* [Wharncliffe ed.] 1837. Vol. I, p. 52.

woman is far from being ridiculous in this country, the greatest families being proud of having produced female writers; and a Milanese lady now being professor of Mathematics in the University of Bologna. . . . To say truth, there is no part of the world where our sex is treated with so much contempt as in England. I do not complain of men for having engrossed the government. In excluding us from all degrees of power, they preserve us from fatigues, many dangers, perhaps many crimes . . . but I think it the highest injustice to be debarred the entertainment of my closet: and that the same studies which raised the character of a man should [be supposed to] hurt that of a woman. We are educated in the grossest ignorance, and no art omitted to stifle our natural reason; if some few get above their nurses' instructions, our knowledge must rest concealed, and be as useless to the world as gold in the mine. I am now speaking according to our English notions, which may wear out some years hence, along with others equally absurd.”⁴⁵

In 1694 Mary Astell's first work was published: *A Serious Proposal To the Ladies For the Advancement of their True and greatest Interest*. Part II followed in 1697, and other editions show the immediate popularity of the book. Meanwhile in 1695 the correspondence between Mary Astell and John Norris, Rector of Bemerton, entitled *Letters Concerning the Love of God*, had been published at his earnest request, to which Mary Astell acceded only because she felt that women might be led to read a book written by a woman.

In 1700 appeared *Some Reflections upon Marriage Occasioned by the Duke and Duchess of Mazarine's Case*. The unhappy Duchess who had come to Chelsea after the separation from her husband, had recently published the

⁴⁵ “Paston,” *Life*, p. 486.

account of her marital troubles. This seems to have aroused the sympathy of Mary Astell for her Chelsea neighbor, and at the same time to have furnished her with the text for a pamphlet on marriage.

From 1704-1705 she was engaged in political and religious controversy. She attacked Defoe in *A Fair Way with the Dissenters and their Patrons*; she opposed Shaftesbury,⁴⁶ in *Bart'lemy Fair or an Enquiry after Wit*, and she defended the royalist party and the Established Church in *An Empartial Enquiry into the Cause of Rebellion and Civil War in this Kingdom*, and in *Moderation truly Stated*. In 1705 she closed her active career as a pamphleteer by a summary of her religious and educational theory in *The Christian Religion As Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England*, although she continued her religious controversies in a letter to Henry Dodwell concerning the non-juror controversy, and helped Dr. John Walker collect material for his work on *The Sufferings of the Clergy*.

Her importance, however, to-day, when the religious and political controversies of the seventeenth century have lost their vitality, lies in her suggestion made in *A Serious Proposal* that a foundation should be established for the education of women along not only religious but secular lines. This suggestion for a woman's college received wide notice immediately and was looked upon favorably in many quarters. Through it Mary Astell became sufficiently well enough known to be mentioned by Evelyn in *Numismata* among the women whose names should be handed down to fame. In 1697 Thomas Burnet of Kemney wrote to the Electress Sophia⁴⁷ telling of Mary Astell's "zeal and Judgment in the advyces given to her

⁴⁶ Mary Astell wrote under the impression that Swift was the author of the *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*.

⁴⁷ Cf. Chap. III, p. 70.

sex, for the reformation of manners, living, studies, and conversations of the ladies;"⁴⁸ in the same year Defoe suggested his variation of the plan, with less room for religious exercises and more emphasis upon secular training;⁴⁹ and for many years men interested in the improvement of social conditions commented upon her proposal. Whether opposed or not, all those discussing the project seemed to feel that Mary Astell had struck out into a new field. Unfortunately, the opposition to so new an idea was greater than the interest in it, and came not only from the satirists of the day, who, like the wits of all ages, found the progressive woman a source of laughter and made Mary Astell the subject of stock jokes in comedies of the *Femmes Savantes* types, but from churchmen, who saw in the plan an attempt to bring back popery. The strongest opponent of the idea was a celebrated bishop, who, as Ballard asserts, prevented a prominent lady from subscribing £10,000 to the plan. Elizabeth Elstob gave to Ballard the name of this celebrated bishop in reply to an inquiry from him.

"I don't remember that I ever heard Mrs. Astell mention the Good Lady's name you desire to know, but very well remember she told me it was Bishop Burnet that prevented that good Design by dissuading that Lady from encouraging it."⁵⁰

"Eversham.

"July 13, 1738."

Bishop Burnet's opposition was not to the education of women, but to what he believed was a Romanist

⁴⁸ Cf. Chap. III, p. 70.

⁴⁹ Cf. Chap. III, p. 70.

⁵⁰ Ballard MS. 43: 29. Miss Fox-Bourne says that no traces of Bishop Burnet's connection with the matter appear in any manuscript surviving from him, but Elizabeth Elstob's letter seems sufficient proof that he was the bishop concerned.

tendency in Mary Astell's proposal. He helped in the education of Lady Mary Montagu, praised the intellectual power of his wife, Elizabeth Burnet, and admired the mental vigor of Queen Mary II. Toward the end of his life he expressed himself, in terms reminiscent of Mary Astell's suggestion, as being in favor of a more serious education for women. Under the date of June 2, 1708, he wrote:

"The ill method of schools and colleges gives the chief rise to the irregularities of the gentry as the breeding young women to vanity, dressing, and a false appearance of interest, and behaviour, without proper work or a due measure of knowledge and a serious sense of religion, is the source of the corruption of that sex: something like monasteries without vows would be a glorious design, and might be set on foot as to be the honour of a Queen on the throne, — but I will pursue this no further."⁵¹

Both the Princess Anne and Lady Elizabeth Hastings have been given credit for the subscription which Bishop Burnet hindered. But from the preface to *A Serious Proposal* it is clear that the Princess Anne was the great lady whom Mary Astell thought of as a benefactor of the proposed foundation. In the original work published in 1694 Mary Astell may not have had the Princess Anne in mind as a prospective patroness. The second part, however, published in 1697, was dedicated to her Royal Highness in terms that are more sincere than those employed in many of the dedications of the time.

"And when I consider you Madam as a Princess who is sensible that the Chief Prerogative of the Great is the Power they have of doing more Good than those in an inferior station can, I see no cause to fear your Royal

⁵¹ Gilbert Burnet, *History of Our Own Times*, Edinburgh, 1728, 4 vols. Vol. IV, p. 205.

Highness will deny encouragement to that which has no other design than the Bettering of the World, especially the most neglected part of it as to all Real Improvement, the Ladies. It is by the exercise of this Power that Princes have become truly Godlike; they are never so illustrious as when they shine as Lights in the World by an Eminent and Heroic virtue.”⁵²

As the project did not die down immediately, Lady Elizabeth Hastings may have interested herself in it later; but her intimacy with Mary Astell did not begin until after 1705. In 1694 Bishop Burnet was on terms of acquaintance with the Princess Anne, if not always in her best graces. By 1698 he was tutoring her son so that any discussion of the subject might easily have been oral.

In the conclusion to the same volume Mary Astell comments upon the interest aroused by her suggestion, and emphasizes again the idea that the foundation she suggests is academic not monastic. The discussion evidently continued until 1705 when in *The Christian Religion as Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England* Mary Astell appealed to the Queen to further her designs for the education of women.

“Among which that which they seem most afraid of is dispeopling the world and driving Folks into Monasteries, tho’ I see none among us for them to run into were they ever so much inclined,— but have heard it generally complained of by very good Protestants that monasteries were Abolished instead of being Reform’d. And tho’ none that I know of plead for Monasteries, strictly so called in England, or for anything else but a reasonable provision of the education of one half of Mankind, and for a safe retreat so long and no longer than our circumstances make it requisite. As is so plainly exprest in what has

⁵² *A Serious Proposal*, Part II, 1697. Dedication.

been said in this business that none can mistake the meaning without great disingenuity and an eager desire to cavil. But generous designs for the Glory of God and the good of Mankind have been opposed in all Ages (even by those who pretend to be the true Patriots) by supposed and far fetched dangers and by misrepresentations, to raise the mob and popular prejudice against them, since reason will not furnish out any objection.

“But may we not hope from the magnificence of a truly Glorious Prince, every year of whose reign, may be reckoned not by the addition of new Oppressions to Drain her Subjects and Enrich Foreigners, but by an increase of new Bounties and Acts of Goodness to Her own People, as well as a Generous exertion of her Power to establish the Tranquillity of Europe: That since her subjects in general have had so liberal a portion of her Royal Beneficence and the Clergyman more particularly an Act that will embalm Her Majesties Name to further Generations, and sound her praise louder than all the Ravages and Victories of Usurping and Ambitious Men, nay even than her own Glorious Victories, truly glorious in that they do not dispossess a rightful owner, but secure his empire, whilst the name of the wicked who dispossess lawful sovereigns shall rot. May we not hope that she will not do less for Her own Sex, than she has already done for the other; but that the next year of her Majesties’ Annals will bear date from her Maternal and Royal cure of the most helpless and most neglected part of her subjects. If She overlooks us, we have no further prospect, for, wherever other People may carry their views, we of the *Church of England* have no hope beyond our Present Sovereign.”⁵³

⁵³ *The Christian Religion*, pp. 141-143.

The extensive notice which Mary Astell's scheme for a woman's college gained is testified to by the satirical references to it. The best known of these attacks is Swift's portrayal of *Madonella* in the *Tatler*, a paper usually regarded as a purely wanton piece of indecency. Its vulgarity has no excuse, but the cause of Swift's bitterness did not lie in his desire to oppose the plan, for he was not unfavorable to the education of women; he was replying to an attack made on the Kit-Cat Club by Mary Astell in *Bart'lemy Fair*, in which she had accused him of being irreligious. In *Tatler* Number 32, Swift, in a manner not in conformity with present taste, described Mary Astell's college for women as if it were really existing in England as a Protestant nunnery with *Madonella* as its head, "A Lady who had writ a fine book concerning the Recluse Life, and was the Projectrix of the Foundation." With her is associated Betty, that is, Lady Elizabeth Hastings.

A rake who with his companions visits the foundation says, "We Travellers who have seen many foreign institutions of this kind have a Curiosity to see in its first Rudiments the seat of Primitive Piety: for such it must be called by future Ages to the Eternal Honour of the Founders. I have read *Madonella*'s excellent and seraphic Discourse on this subject." The Lady immediately answers, "If what I have said could have contributed to raise any Thoughts in you that may make for the Advancement of intellectual and divine Conversation, I should think myself extremely happy." The rest of the paper relates the conquest of the college by the group of rakes.

Less objectionable in statement is Swift's second paper.

"*Madonella* who as 'twas thought had long since taken her Flight towards the Aetherial Mansions, still walks, it seems in the Regions of Mortality, where she has found,

by deep Reflections on the Revolution mentioned in yours of June the 23d, That where early Instructions have been wanting to imprint true Ideas of Things on the tender Souls of those of her Sex, they are never after able to arrive at such a pitch of Perfection, as to be above the Laws of Matter and Motion: Laws which are considerably enforced by the Principles usually imbued in Nurseries and Boarding-Schools. To remedy this Evil she has laid the Scheme of a College for young Damsels, where, instead of Scissors, Needles, and Samplers, pens, compasses, quadrants, books, manuscripts, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew are to take up their whole Time. Only on Holydays the Students will, for moderate exercise, be allowed to divert themselves with the use of some of the lightest and most volatile weapons: and proper Care will be taken to give them at least a superficial Tincture of the Ancient and Modern Amazonian Tacticks. Of these Military Performances the Direction is undertaken by Epicene, the Writer of Memoirs from the Mediterranean, who, by the Help of some artificial Poisons conveyed by Smells, has within these few Weeks brought many persons of both Sexes to an untimely Fate; and what is more surprising, has contrary to her Profession, with the same Orders, revived others who had long since been drowned in the whirlpools of Lethe. Another of the Professors is to be a certain Lady, who is now publishing two of the choicest Saxon Novels, which are said to have been in as great Repute with the Ladies of Queen Emma's Court, as the Memoirs from the New Atalantis are with those of ours. I shall make it my business to enquire into the Progress of this learned institution, and give you the first notice of their Philosophical Transactions and Searches after Nature.

“Yours &c,

“Tobiah Green.”

The grouping of Mrs. Manley's name with those of Elizabeth Elstob and herself as instructors in the school could not have been pleasing to Mary Astell and might easily not have been entirely satisfactory to Mrs. Manley.

Steele was also included in the attack, but took revenge more in accord with his character. In Number 166 of the *Tatler*, in discussing certain phases of *decorum*, he brings in Mary Astell to illustrate his point.

"There are rules and decorums which are never to be transgressed by those who understand the world; and he who offends in this kind ought not to take it ill if he is turned away, even when he sees the person look out at her window whom he inquires for. 'Nay,' said he, 'My Lady Dimple is so positive in this rule, that she takes it for a piece of good breeding and distinction to deny herself with her own mouth. Mrs. Comma, the great scholar insists upon it; and I myself that a lord's porter or a lady's woman cannot be said to lie in this case because they act by instruction; and their words are no more their own than those of a puppet.'"⁵⁴

In Number 253 Steele again pays his respects to Mary Astell by making her appear as one of the jury in a court of Honour. "The foreman," he says, "was a professed Platonist that had spent much of her time in exhorting the sex to set a just value upon their persons, and to make the men know themselves."

More interesting still as showing a wide-spread knowledge of Mary Astell's plan are the references to her in the contemporary plays which deal with the learned lady. For a hundred years the "philosophical lady" had been

⁵⁴ This skit in the *Tatler* was probably the origin of Ballard's statement that Mary Astell was a recluse and refused to see guests, that "she would look out at the window, and jestingly tell them . . . 'Mrs. Astell is not at home;'" and in good earnest keep them out. . . ."

a butt for satire. Through the early seventeenth century woman had been attacked in the coarse popular broadsides, in the *Characters*, and in current plays, but the satire had dealt with physical and moral characteristics rather than with intellectual. In the *Characters* the woman pedant does not appear, John Earle's *A She Precise Hypocrite* approaching most nearly to the type.⁵⁵ Such coarse papers as *The Ladies Parliament* series have references to the "philosophical lady."⁵⁶ Some reflection of her type is found early in the century in Jonson's *Volpone* and Fletcher's *The Wild Goose Chase*. After the Restoration, through the comedies of Molière, the pedantic woman who had by this time developed into the *précieuse*, became a stock figure of English satire.

Molière's *Femmes Savantes* was published in 1672, and had an immediate influence on English comedy. Thomas Wright's *The Female Vertuoso* of 1693 follows closely Molière's plot, with the added coarseness of Restoration drama. Three types of learned lady appear: the mother, that is, the married woman who teaches her husband by her contempt for his powers and by her hen-pecking tendencies as well as by filling his house with would-be poets; the daughter, outwardly devoted to natural philosophy and Platonic love, but inwardly in love with the suitor whom she has seemingly rejected; and the unmarried older woman, represented here, as in Molière, as regarding all men as in love with her. Mariana, like Molière's Henriette is the ideal type, the girl of good sense, who straightforwardly accepts the suitor whom she loves.

An earlier imitation by Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy*, of 1678, varies more from Molière and has features fol-

⁵⁵ Cf. List of *Characters* in *Mod. Lang. Ass. Pub.* 1904, New Series, 2, pp. 104-114.

⁵⁶ *The Ladies a Second Time Assembled*, 1647, p. 1.

lowed by later comedies of the same type. The character of Lady Knowall is only slightly developed as that of an artificial pedant with some inclinations toward science as in the French satires, but ready to draw her daughter's lover to herself by unpleasant advances. The character combination of pedant and lover prevails in the succeeding comedy, as does also the satire on the interest in science which was not developed so much among English women as among the French.

By 1709, the time of Swift's Madonella in the *Tatler*, when Mary Astell had become well known, Mrs. Centlivre used her in *The Basset Table*, as a specific instance of the learned lady. The French influence is prominent in this play in that Valeria's pseudo-learning consists in experimental science. Mingled with a satire on gaming is the story of Valeria whose father wishes her to marry a sea captain but who has fixed her affections upon Ensign Lovely. He is not appalled by her pretensions to knowledge, but only seeks her more earnestly. As he puts the situation: "That little She Philosopher has made me do Penance more heartily than ever my Sins did; I deserve her by mere dint of Patience. I have stood whole Hours to hear her assert, that Fire cannot burn nor Water drown, nor Pain afflict and Forty ridiculous Systems."⁵⁷ Her father is hopelessly at a loss to understand his philosophical daughter and her aunt, Lady Reveller, can only say in despair, "Well, Cousin, might I advise, you to bestow your Fortune in founding a College for the Study of Philosophy, where none but Women should be admitted; and to immortalize your Name they should be called *Valerians*."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *The Works of Mrs. Centlivre*, London, 1771, Vol. 1, p. 210. Cf. Myra Reynolds, *The Poems of Anne, Countess of Winchilsea*, Chicago, 1903, pp. LXI-LXII.

⁵⁸ *Works of Mrs. Centlivre*. Vol. I, pp. 217-218.

The character of Valeria differs somewhat from others of the type in that she is presented as in love, and not as to be won only by long struggle. In Act III, Ensign Lovely is discovered attempting to state his affection for her while she is discussing the circulation of blood in a fish's tail. He finally secures her attention long enough to declare his passion. She nonchalantly accepts him because he loves philosophy. At this point her father appears upon the scene; Valeria throws philosophy to the winds and preserves Lovely from her father's wrath by emptying out a fish she has been dissecting and placing Lovely under the tub that had contained it. The captain whom her father has designed for her enters, sues for her hand, but is appalled by the *précis* language in which she replies. Valeria declares her determination to marry Lovely, and in the good old-fashioned way successfully submerges philosophy in marriage.

Cibber's *Refusal* of 1721 is still another adaptation of Molière with the number of characters reduced and the action complicated. Lady Wrangle, the mother, is in love with Frankly, who has loved the Platonic lady Sophronia, but now loves her sister Charlotte. Both Lady Frankly and Sophronia believe Frankly to be in love with them. The plot is complicated by Sophronia's lover, Granger, who is supposed to have accepted her Platonic requirements, but who succeeds in overcoming them. Both Sophronia and Charlotte are weaker and coarser than Molière's Armande and Henriette. In this play there seems to be a reference to Mary Astell in the account of Lady Wrangle's education. Frankly is speaking to Sir Gilbert, the hen-pecked husband of Lady Wrangle, who replies:

“O! Sir, Learning's a fine Accomplishment in a fine Lady.

“Ay, it's no matter for that, she's a great Plague to me: Not but my Lord Bishop her Uncle was a mighty

good man; she lived all along with him; I took her upon his word: 'twas he made her a Scholar; I thought her a Miracle — before I had her, I us'd to go and hear her talk *Latin* with him an Hour together, and there I — I — I played the Fool — I was wrong, I should not have married again — and yet I was so fond of her Parts, I begg'd him to give my eldest Daughter the same fine Education, and so he did — but to tell you the truth, I believe both their Heads are turned.'"⁵⁹

The general satire on women contained in contemporary comedy has in these plays become localized and shows in references to Mary Astell the extent of the discussion of her plan. There can be no question that she is satirized as Valeria, who might found a college for women. The reference to Lady Wrangle's education by an uncle who taught her Latin follows tradition as to the source of Mary Astell's education. The fact that numerous references to her could appear twelve years after her last published pamphlet and that her works could be re-issued the next year suggests that her project remained for some time before the public.

From 1709 Mary Astell published no more pamphlets, although her period of activity was by no means over, as she wrote new prefaces to her works. She was not at this time so entirely a recluse as some of her biographers imply. Nor was she inclined merely to a life of religious meditation. An unpublished letter to Sir Hans Sloane shows how wide her scientific interests were, and how far her circle of friends extended.

"Mannor Street.
"Apr. 25th, 1724.

"When I had ye good fortune to (me)et you at Mrs. Green's you were so (kind) (a)s to give me leave to waite on you (with a) small

⁵⁹ Cibber's *Dramatic Works*, London, 1775, Vol. IV, pp. 18-19.

curiosity. I know not to wch () mineral: you will () it but I know it is akin to both. ye Lord Huntington and her Ladyship are desirous to see your noble Reposi(tory). (W)ill you be pleas'd, Sir, to name a day (wch will) (no)t be inconvenient and permit me to waite ye wishes wch will be a great favour.

“Y^r most humble serv’t,

“M. ASTELL.

“I go out of Town very soon.”⁶⁰

Unable to arouse practical interest in her scheme for a woman’s college, she turned her sociological efforts towards the establishment of a charity school for girls in Chelsea. A letter, undated and unsigned, but identified by a comparison with the one just quoted, relates to this school.

“(Si)r

“You will please to remember, when you allow’d me ye most (enjoy)-able entertainment of seeing (your) nable collections in Compan(y) of some honorable Ladys, they in ye Charity School at Chelsea. (You) were so good as to offer a piece of wch offer as I hear by Mr. Green you lately renew’d. (I) make no doubt Sr. but you are able (to) make good your Title, but we are to find upon inquiry it is disputed. In the building by ye Road up Mr. Green’s ground and be more (pr)ejudicial to him than in the place wch Wm. Green offers. I should be glad (of a)n uncontested spot wch might please (eve)rybody and to receive your directions.”⁶¹

The school was established a few years later by the group of friends closest to Mary Astell, and before her death she had the pleasure of knowing of the carrying out of her plans.

According to the reports at present in the Royal Hospital at Chelsea, this charity school for the education of the daughters of the Pensioners of Chelsea Hospital was established in 1729 by the Right Honorable Lady Catherine Jones, Lady Elizabeth Hastings, Lady Ann Coventry and

⁶⁰ Sloane MS., 4047 : 163.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 4045 : 336.

other benevolent persons. Lady Elizabeth Hastings in her lifetime conveyed lands in the parishes of Ledsham, Thorparch, and Cottingham in the County of York, in trust, among other purposes for payment of ten guineas annually to the Chelsea Charity School to increase with the improvement of rent, and in 1805 it was increased accordingly to £21 per annum.⁶² In her will Lady Catherine Jones left £400 to the school,⁶³ to which was added a fund of £1262:15s. by Lady Frances Coningsby in 1770. The school flourished until the latter part of the nineteenth century, when it was discontinued at Chelsea, but the funds are at present being used to keep the girls in school elsewhere, that given by Lady Elizabeth Hastings still supporting three girls.⁶⁴

Mary Astell lived but two years beyond the time she saw the fruit of her efforts in the school for girls. Numerous stories as to her death have been preserved and enlarged upon by succeeding biographers.⁶⁵ A simple

⁶² MSS., Reports in Royal Hospital, Chelsea.

⁶³ Wills, Somerset House, Lady Catherine Jones, 1740.

⁶⁴ The interest in education stimulated by Mary Astell did not cease with the Royal Hospital Charity School. In 1740 at the suggestion of Dr. Sloane Elsmere, Rector, it was proposed to establish a charity school for the girls of Chelsea. "As whatever are reasons for instructing and educating the male children of the Poor, hold equally, perhaps more strongly for instructing and educating their female children, it is proposed that, as the former have, for some years past, been provided for in this way, the latter may . . . become likewise the object of our care and compassion."

F. Faulkner, *An Historical and Topographical Description of Chelsea and its Environs*, Chelsea, 1829, 2 vols. Vol. II, p. 93.

⁶⁵ Ballard gives an account of a serious operation which she endured unflinchingly. He is also authority for the story, which I have been unable to verify, of her having her coffin and shroud before her to remind her of the shortness of life. This story gave Prof. A. H. Upham foundation for the suggestion that Richardson had Mary

statement of the facts appears in a letter of Lady Elizabeth Hastings written to Bishop Wilson.

"The great and good Mrs. Astell died at Chelsea the 9th of this month; she was five days actually a dying. Lady Catherine Jones was with her two days before her death; she then begged to see no more of her old acquaintances and friends, having done with the world, and made her peace with God; and what she had then to do was to bear her pains with patience, cheerfulness, and entire resignation to the Divine Will. Lady Catherine adds that she believes her words were turned into as perfect an exercise of those virtues as ever mortality arrived at. She was carried off in less than two months of a dropsy or swelling lympany. She has made a vast progress in the spiritual life for the last two or three years she lived.

"Ledstone May 19" [1736]⁶⁶

She was buried in the Churchyard of Chelsea Church, May 14, 1731, and on May 24th the following notice of her death appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine*; "Mrs. Astell, Author of several ingenious Pieces, at Chelsea."

The accessible facts of Mary Astell's life are few. A just estimate of the life and the character of an individual from such meager material is very difficult; yet even these few facts show the uprightness of motive that made her

Astell in mind when drawing Clarissa. Other features hardly seem to correspond, and Ballard's difficulty in gathering material for her biography in 1752 would imply that her reputation had died out. Mrs. Chapone, who might have been a connecting link, did not begin her correspondence with Richardson until 1750, after the publication of *Clarissa*.

Cf. *Mod. Lang. Notes*, April, 1913. A Parallel for Richardson's Clarissa.

⁶⁶ John Keble, *Life of Bishop Wilson*, 2 vols. 1863. Vol. I, Pt. II, pp. 848-849. The date supplied by Keble is obviously wrong, as the burial register gives 1731.

a leader in thought to her friends and the center of a group of progressive women. At the same time her independence brought upon her the unpleasant notoriety and the isolation that often come to a pioneer. Although this opposition hardened her to some extent and led her to retire more into herself for religious consolation, she retained until her death the strong affection of the younger women whom she had influenced.

But if her personal life is hidden, the services she attempted to render to society are clear. Although her writings touched a wide variety of fields, political, social, and philosophical, her chief interests were educational. The political and religio-political pamphlets have passed into oblivion with the controversies that called them forth, but the educational pamphlets are arousing interest to-day, not from the presentation of a psychological and philosophical standpoint new in Mary Astell's time, but because they suggested colleges for women of somewhat the same type as those to-day and because they stated for the first time educational and social problems that have not yet been solved.

CHAPTER II

EDUCATIONAL WRITINGS

MARY ASTELL'S educational pamphlets were a direct outgrowth of the ideas and needs of the time in which she lived. But their roots extended back into the preceding century and had fed upon continental as well as English thought. The first books in England dealing with the education of women were written in the sixteenth century and were a part of the heritage given to Elizabethan England by Spain and Italy. From Italy there had come the ideals of Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* and the Italian idea of *virtù* as applicable to women as well as to men; from Spain, the influence of Guevara and the writings of Vives, tutor to Catherine of Aragon. In his educational writings, Vives showed a viewpoint less liberal than the Italian toward the education of women, since he desired a more secluded life for them and their education for marriage, if they did not serve the Church, but he felt no interest in the development of their personalities. He objected to the reading of romances because it would draw away the woman's ideas from the home for which she was being reared. Erasmus added little to the suggestions of Vives. At first he did not approve of education for women, but he was so impressed by the intellectual attainments of the daughters of Sir Thomas More that he modified his attitude.

With the development of protestantism the situation changed. Up to the time of protestant power women had

been able to choose between marriage and a convent life. By the closing of the monasteries, they lost the chance for education in the convent schools or for life in the convents as daughters of the church. Through the seventeenth century some serious-minded man or woman often looked back with regret at the opportunity the nunneries had afforded. Such a one was Mary Ward¹ whose ideas, in some measure like those of Mary Astell, preceded hers by nearly a hundred years. Such were Nicholas Ferrar, Lettice Falkland and the ladies of Naish Court, but their attempts to make a change were only sporadic.

The ideal of marriage as the goal of a woman's life advocated by Vives² and Erasmus, and regarded by Luther as the sole possibility open to women is fully expressed in the form it was held in the early seventeenth century by Richard Brathwayte in *The English Gentlewoman*. The religious conflicts of the day, the antagonism between the socialistic and the individualistic attitudes, the slow democratization that was beginning, together with the strict demarcation felt necessary by many of the better class in society between the intellectual and the home

¹ Mary Ward (1585-1645) a young catholic English woman sought to enter a religious life on the Continent. As she desired to assist young English women of her own faith, she refused enclosure. Her order for women, founded on the principles of the Jesuit order for men, though looked upon with favor by many leading Jesuits, was finally suppressed by the Pope in 1631. Under Queen Henrietta Maria, Mary Ward returned to England and established a foundation at London and later at Haworth near York. After her death the establishment moved to Paris and a community was organized in Rome. In 1703 the Second Institute was approved as to its rule by Pope Clement IX, and in 1877 Pope Pius IX approved it as an institute under the title "The Institute of the Blessed Virgin." It still retains its early object of giving education to women.

² Cf. summary in Foster Watson. *Vives and the Renascence Education of Women*, 1912.

life for women, formed the background against which later discussions stand out.

Even in families of prominence and among thoughtful women, there was no agreement as to how much education should be given to a girl. Elizabeth Joselyn, in her *Letter to an Unborn Child*, 1623, shows a thoughtful mother questioning the wisdom of an education that might make her daughter less useful in the home. The same questioning of ideals was shown in the drama, where the educated woman appeared under the term "philosophical lady," under which term she is discussed in plays and broadsides until puritan times, to reappear under French influence in Restoration comedy.

The less educated women who had come to the front with the development of the protestant sects were entering into the public life to such an extent that Brathwayte gives warning against "she clarkes." The opening of the eighteenth century saw still more of this discussion, partly an academic argument derived from continental pamphlets,³ and partly a practical problem aroused by the question as to whether or not women should preach and have an active part in church government.⁴ On the other hand there

³ Cf. Appendix II, pp. 176-182, for a discussion of some of these pamphlets. Of the pamphlets written by women those by Mademoiselle de Jars de Gournay *De l'égalité des hommes et des femmes*, 1622, and Anne Schurman *De ingenii mulieribus ad doctrinam et meliores litteras aptitudine*, 1641, were known in England. The second was translated into English in 1695 under the title *The Learned Maid or whether a Maid may be a Scholar, a Logicke exercise written in Latin by that incomparable Virgin Anna Maria v. Schurman of Utrecht*. Mary Astell makes no mention of either, and a likeness between the idea of *A Serious Proposal* and the latter may be the result merely of the same types of mind working on the same problem.

⁴ Richard Brathwayte, *The English Gentlewoman*, 1631, p. 89, discusses the subject of women, showing his prejudice and the power of the time. "Touching the subject of your discourse, when opportunity

was a recognition in contemporary pamphlets of the lack of occupation that led many both married and unmarried to frivolity and worse.

Wider in its influence than the puritan attitude at this time was the power of the court. James I added nothing to the development of women. Through Henrietta Maria the court of Charles I acquired an interest in so-called Platonism which degenerated into license and in an attenuated form extended into the eighteenth century. The great vogue of French romances, increased by the numerous translations from 1650 on, followed by such coarse works as Mrs. Manley's *New Atlantis*, had a weakening effect on the moral character of the reading public, and licentiousness was aroused by the example of the court of Charles II. Some groups of women not at court were imitating the *précieuses* of French society, as Katherine Philips and her circle who studied "Nature," according to the custom of the French women of their day.

The increasing reading public among women had brought about numerous editions of books supposedly suited to their capacity, such as *The Ladies Dictionaries* and *The Ladies Cabinets* of the *Term Catalogues* with their mingling

shall exact it of you, and without touch of immodesty, expect it from you, make choice of such arguments as may best improve your knowledge in household affaires, and other private employments. To discourse of State-matters, will not become your auditory, nor to dispute of high points of Divinity will it sort well with *women* of your quality. The *Shee-clarkes* many times broach strange opinions; which, as they understand them not themselves, so they labour to intangle others of equall understanding to themselves. That Divine sentence, being made an individuate consort to their memory, would reclaime them from this error, and free them from this opinionate censure: *God forbid that we should not be readier to learn than to teach.* Women, as they are to be no *Speakers* in the Church, so neither are they to be disputers of controversies of the Church."

of recipes for housewifery and cookery, preserving and surgery, as well as the lighter type of feminine reading. On the other hand, a certain independence had come to some groups of women through a repetition of the situation that had occurred in feudal society. While their husbands had been away at war, they had felt the responsibility of carrying on the home establishment. They had thus learned through the legal tangles involved by the death of male relatives that women needed a knowledge of business and of law.

Up to 1660 the literary work of English women had been largely the keeping of religious day-books, preparing manuals of prayers, etc. The women entering into literature after that time recognized so fully the prejudice they would meet that they often covered their productions with anonymity, not necessarily from the sense of shame that the modern reader thinks might easily lead them to do so, but from the fear that the work would not be well received were it known to come from the hand of a woman. Aphra Behn,⁵ Mrs. Manley,⁶ Catherine Trotter,⁷ and Mrs. Centlivre,⁸ all gave the same reason for anonymity. Writers of more serious works had a similar attitude. Mary Astell voiced the same idea in her *Serious Proposal*,⁹ and Elizabeth Elstob expressed hesitancy in publishing her Anglo-Saxon Grammar. From the reception of these works by the wits of the day, it is clear that the feeling was justified.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century was written a long series of pamphlets attacking social problems from

⁵ *Sir Patient Fancy*. Epilogue.

⁶ *The Lost Lovers*. 1696, Preface and Prologue.

⁷ *Agnes de Castro*. Preface.

⁸ *Dramatic Works of Mrs. Centlivre*. Preface.

⁹ *Serious Proposal*, p. 24.

the standpoint of religion. While many of these are purely hortatory, some attempt to deal constructively with educational problems, and a few touch the education of women. How widespread the attempt was to change evil conditions is shown by the numerous pamphlets mentioned in the *Term Catalogues*, two of the most influential of which were *The Ladies Calling* and *The Gentleman's Calling*.¹⁰

Written from the standpoint of the Established Church, *The Ladies Calling* aims to reach the ladies of rank and to turn their minds to true piety. The author claims to believe women capable of developing their understandings,

¹⁰ The authorship of *The Ladies Calling* is still in dispute. Mary Astell claimed *The Whole Duty of Man* for Lady Pakington. The following note from the *Post Man* may add weight to the claim of Bishop Fell, or to the theory that Lady Pakington wrote under his influence.—

“The Post Man.

“Sept. 13–Sept. 15, 1698.
“No. 513.

“Whereas one John Back, Bookseller on London Bridge, hath published a Book which he calls *The Whole Duty of Prayer* and several other books which he falsely pretends were wrote by the Author of *The Whole Duty of Man*. This is to give notice that they are none of them wrote by that author and that the world may not be further imposed upon nor the worthy Author abused, hereunder are incircled all the Books which were written by him, as appears from the preface to the said author's works, written by Dr. Fell, Bishop of Oxford.

The Whole Duty of Man.
The Decay of Christian Duty.
The Gentleman's Calling.
The Ladies Calling.
The Government of the Tongue.
The Art of Contentment.
The Lovely Oracle.

all of which are only printed for Edward Pawlet at the Bible in Chancery Lane.”

which have become weak through lack of use. Although, for purposes of argument, he does not insist that they have mental power equal to that of men, at least he is confident that they have souls. He discusses the characteristics women should have and the states through which women pass, virginity, wifehood, and widowhood.

Housewifery, "the Art of Economy and Household Managery," is urged as a subject for study. Moreover a wise woman must learn to dress moderately for a "wise man won't dare to marry a woman who has too expensive clothes." Writing, needle-work, languages, and music compose the rest of the scheme of education.

The usual duties of morality are enjoined, with an especial warning for women to keep silent in the churches, as Paul commanded. "And tho' this seems only restrained to the ecclesiastical assemblies, yet even so it reaches home to the gifted women of our Age, who take upon themselves to be Teachers. Where he allowed them not to speak in the Church, no not in order to learning,—tho a more modest design than that of teaching."¹¹

The well-worn theme that women are becoming masculine draws his attention.¹² The sexes are inverted, he claims;

¹¹ *The Ladies Calling*, 1675. 3rd ed., p. 9.

¹² The masculine woman was not an unknown subject of satire. A delightful tract, printed in 1620, much of which might easily appear as a present day satire, is *Hic Mulier or the Man-Woman*. In a cartoon on the title page a barber is represented as standing between two women, one long and one short haired, with the question: "Will you be trimmed or truss'd?" In several pages the *iron* women of the age are discussed. "For since the days of Adam women were never so masculine: masculine in their genders and whole generations, from the Mother to the youngest Daughter, masculine in Number from one to Multitudes. Masculine even from the head to the foot; masculine in mode, from bold speech to impudent action; and masculine in tense; for (without redresse) they were are and will be still more masculine, most mankind and most monstrous. Are all women then

some men have become effeminate and some women bold, even swearing and drinking, a “prodigious” thing in women. To overcome the temptation to such evils women are urged to cultivate their minds, that they may get a reasonable basis for faith, and to follow the precepts of morality. They are exhorted to remember that the chief state of woman is obedience to authority, as shown by

turn'd masculine? No God forbid there are a world full of holy thoughts, modest carriage, and severe chastity: to these let me fall on my knees and say, You O, you women; you good women: you that are — Castles impregnable, Rivers unfailable, Seas immovable, infinit treasures, and invincible armes: that are helpers most trustie, centinels most careful, signes deceitful . . . O doe not looke to finde your names in this Declamation . . . when I write of you, I will write with a golden pen on leaves of golden paper: now I write with a rough quill and blacke inke on iron sheetes, the iron deeds of an iron generation.

Come then, you masculine-women — for you are my Subject . . . when to name him that named all things might study an Age to give you a right attribute, whose like are not found in any Antiquaries study, in any Bea-man's travell, nor in any Painters cunning, you that are stranger than strangeness itself . . . exchanging the modest attire of the comely Hood, Cawle, Coyfe, handsome Dresse or Kerchiefe, to the Cloudy, Ruffianly brodd-brimm'd Hatte, and wanton Feather, the modest upper parts of a concealing straight gowne — to the French doublet — the glory of a faire large hayre to the shame of most ruffianly short lockes: — for needles swords, for Prayer-books handy jigs, for modest gestures gyant like behaviours, and for womens modestie all Manishe and Apish incivilities.” The result if women become “so much man in all things that they are neither men nor women, but just good for nothing.”

“Remember how your Maker made for our first Parents coates, not one coat but a coat for the man and a coat for the woman: coates of severall fashions, severall formes, and for severall uses,— the man's coat fit for his labour, the woman's fit for her modestie; and will you lose the modell left by this great worke-master of Heaven?”

The only thing left to be done to keep women in that modesty of apparell suited to their condition as women, is for men to refuse them money with which to buy such garments. History repeats itself.

the fact that "God and Nature do attest the particular expediency of this to women, by having placed that Sex in a degree of inferiority to the other. Nay, farther it is observable that as there are but three states of life thro which they can regularly pass, viz. Virginity, Marriage, and Widowhood, — two of them are states of Sub-mission, the first to the parent, the second to the husband, and the third, as it is casual whether ever they arrive to it or not, so if they do, we find it by God himself reckon'd as a condition the most desolate and deplorable, — but however it evinces that God sets not the same value upon their being masterless which some of them do, whilst he reckons them most miserable when they are most at liberty."¹³

The author regrets the lack of convents, admires women who are voluntarily serving God, unmarried, and comments on the general unfavorable attitude toward unmarried women, which he considers partly deserved because of their foolish behavior. To avoid such a reputation the daughter should be carefully guarded at home, and not be allowed to wander around unchaperoned according to the growing custom of the time.

As to marriage, the parents are to decide for their daughters and the maiden must be governed by such choice, for even unwise parents are wiser than inexperienced daughters. "But," he continues, "as a daughter is neither to anticipate nor contradict the will of her Parent, so (to hang the balance even) I must say she is not obliged to force her own, by marrying where she cannot love, for a negative voice in the case is as much the child's right as the Parents'."¹⁴ The poor unmarried maid was thus left with a chance to refuse marriage, but with nothing to fill

¹³ *The Ladies Calling*, p. 44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

its place unless she took up a self-imposed religious life at a time when there were no religious establishments to enter.

The topic of woman's place and duty was discussed from a more secular standpoint and yet with more far-reaching influence in *The Lady's New-Year's-Gift or Advice to a Daughter*, a work by the practical statesman George Savile, Marquis of Halifax. The daughter for whom the book was written was the mother of Lord Chesterfield, who continued the custom of parental advice in the letters to his son. At its publication in 1678, the book first mentioned won immediate popularity, passing through twenty-five editions. In spite of its practical nature and suggestions as to how a woman should adapt herself to life by becoming a "Trimmer," it has a tenderness that is attractive.¹⁵

But the tenderness of his feeling toward her does not prevent Lord Halifax from showing his daughter the place woman holds in the estimation of the time. He portrays for her the useless woman who thinks the care of a family beneath her, or fears to weight her mind with duties lest she should bring wrinkles to her face:¹⁶ he calls her attention to the woman who attempts to appear young, "Girls of Fifty, who resolve to be always *Young*, whatever *Time*

¹⁵ *Complete Works of George Savile*, Oxford, 1912, p. 46.

"but I must restrain my Thoughts which are full of my Dear Child and would overflow into a Volume, which would not be fit for a New-Year's-Gift. I will conclude with my warmest Wishes for all that is good to you. That you may live so as to be an Ornament to your Family, and a Pattern to your Sex. That you may be blessed with a Husband that may value, and with Children that may inherit your Virtue; That you may shine in the World by a true Light, and silence Envy by deserving to be esteemed; That Wit and Virtue may both conspire to make you a great Figure."

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

with his Iron Teeth hath determined to the contrary": he desires that religion be the chief object of her thoughts but warns her against over-emotionalism and an affected appearance of devotion, and urges in their place a religion that becomes "a steady course of good *Life*, that may run like a smooth Stream, and be a perpetual Spring to furnish to the Continued Exercise of Virtue."¹⁷ She is not, however, to enquire into the basis of religion, but to keep that in which she was born, or follow her husband's, since she is expected still less than a man to enquire into its truth by voluminous reading.¹⁸

The Ladies Calling and *Advice to a Daughter* represent the more serious forms of the discussion relating to women that were prevalent at Mary Astell's time. They largely influenced contemporary thought, the one written from the religious, the other from the practical standpoint, but both keeping the conservative point of view as to the position and the education of women. The periodical press also entered into feminist discussions. Before Addison and Steele, to whom the casual reader is likely to attribute erroneously the revived interest in the education of women, there appeared discussions under whose satire and fun there was a considerable seriousness. As early as 1691, in Number 18 of *The Athenian Mercury*, the question is propounded as to whether or not it is proper for a woman to be learned. The answer reads: "On the whole since they have as noble souls as well, a finer genius, and generally quicker apprehension, we see no reason why women should not be learned, as well as Madam Philips, Van Schurman and others have formerly been." The writer further states that women in the past have gone mad with learning, but so have men. From that time on *The Athenian Mercury* proposed to devote the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

■ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

first Tuesday of every month to answering questions from and about the female sex. Thus was the first woman's page established in a periodical. Many of the questions and answers were humorous and satirical, but the paper opened with a thoughtful discussion, perhaps even more serious than those of Addison in *The Spectator*. That such discussions had gotten into print indicates the general interest in the subject. The preface to *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* shows that they had become matter of conversation in polite circles, and Swift's fragmentary *Of the Education of Ladies* testifies to the continuance of the discussion.

From the time of Sir Thomas More there had been a slight but persistent tradition as to the propriety of giving a classical education to women, and in each decade there had been a few women who carried on the tradition. Sir Thomas More's daughters, Sir Anthony Cooke's daughters, Queen Elizabeth, all were called learned in their time. The Countess of Pembroke knew Latin and Italian, and with the Cary sisters held the interest of wits of the time in their salons. The next decades saw Lady Carlisle, Lucy Hutchinson who studied French with her French maid and was taught Latin by her father's chaplain, and Mrs. Makin, the learned sister of Dr. Pell. The Countess of Winchelsea and Elizabeth Elstob, to mention only a few, carried the tradition to the following century. Classical education still persisted through the eighteenth century, finding its greatest representative in Elizabeth Carter, whom Dr. Johnson regarded as the most learned woman of her time.

Most of the instruction received by women during these centuries was given by private tutors. Schools for girls in the seventeenth century were few in number and chiefly seminaries for instruction in music, dancing, and embroid-

ery. The Matchless Orinda was educated in Mrs. Solomon's school at Hackney. In 1673 Mrs. Bathusa Makin, formerly tutor to the daughter of Charles I, published *An Essay to revive the antient education of Gentlewomen*. She comments on the common curriculums of schools for girls, dancing, music, singing, writing, keeping accounts, and, while not disregarding these usual subjects of instruction, would add to them Latin and French, with Greek, Hebrew, Italian and Spanish, for those who wished a broader course of study. Cooking might be combined with history, or preserving with arithmetic if so desired by those remaining long enough at school. The methods of Comenius and his follower William Petty were to be used in the association of *real* objects with the subjects of classical study. In 1677 a school was advertised at Oxford, and Chelsea and Hackney also had seminaries, all with a less generous curriculum than Mrs. Makin offered.

In such a mental environment Mary Astell began her work. Dissatisfied with the type of education such schools offered, she sought for something more serious. Though influenced by those who preceded her, she is not slavishly dependent upon them, but adds new suggestions for the practical carrying out of their ideas.

In her letters in 1694 to John Norris concerning the love of God, Mary Astell had expressed a feeling of deep solicitude for the character and the salvation of the women around her. This strong desire to turn their minds from the frivolous things of the world to higher spiritual desires led her to write her first educational work, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest*, printed anonymously in 1695. Knowing the satirical attitude of the time, she feared the criticism her book would receive.

"For Custom has usurpt such an unaccountable Authority, that she who would endeavor to put a stop to its arbitrary sway, and reduce it to Reason, is in a fair way to render herself the Butt for all the Fops in Town to shoot their impertinent Censures at. And tho' a wise woman will not value their censure, yet she cares not to be the subject of their Discourse."¹⁹

The censure occasioned by the publication of her tract was evidently not so harsh as she had expected, although sufficient to make her hesitate as to future publication. In the introduction to Part II, she writes: "Did the author of the former essay towards the Improvement of the Ladies consult her own Reputation only, she would not hazard it once more, by treating so nice a subject in so curious and censorious an age, but content herself with the favorable reception which the good-natured part of the world were pleased to afford to her first essay. It is not unusual she knows for writers to mind no more than their own credit, to be pleased, if they can make a handsome flourish, get a name amongst the Authors, come off with but a little censure and some commendations. . . . But give her leave to profess, she is very indifferent what the critics say, if the Ladies receive any advantage by her attempts to serve them, so it will give her the greatest uneasiness if having prov'd that they are capable of the best things, she can't persuade to a pursuit of them. It were more to her satisfaction, to find her Project condemned as foolish and impertinent, than to find it received with some approbation and yet nobody endeavoring to put it in practice."²⁰

Part I of *The Serious Proposal* is dedicated to the ladies, who, since they have given attention to many suggestions of no value, will, she hopes, be no less kind in attending

¹⁹ *Serious Proposal*, p. 74.

²⁰ *Serious Proposal*, Pt. II, p. 1.

to a subject, which, as Mary Astell states the matter, "comes attended with more certain and substantial Gain, whose only design is to improve your Charme and heighten your Value, by suffering you no longer to be cheap and contemptible. Its aim is to fix that Beauty, to make it lasting and permanent, which Nature with all the helps of art cannot secure, and to place it out of the reach of sickness and old age, by transferring it from a corruptible Body to an immortal Mind. An obliging Design, which wou'd procure them inward Beauty, to whom Nature has unkindly denied the outward, and not permit those Ladies who have comely Bodies to tarnish their Glory with deformed Souls. Would have you all be Wits, or what is better, Wise. Raise you above the vulgar by something more truly illustrious than a sounding title or a great estate. Would excite in you a generous emulation to excel in the best things, and not in such trifles as every mean person who has but money enough may purchase as well as you. Not suffer you to take up with the low thought of distinguishing yourselves by anything that is not truly valuable and procure you such Ornaments as all the Treasures of the Indies are not able to purchase. Would help you to surpass the Men as much in Virtue and Ingenuity, as you do in Beauty, that you may not only be as lively but as wise as Angels. Exalt and establish your Fame, more than the best wrought Poems and loudest Panegyricks, by enobling your Minds with such Graces as really deserve it. And instead of the Fustian complements and Fulsome Flatteries of your Admirers, obtain for you the Plaudits of Good Men and Angels, and the approbation of Him who cannot err. In a word render you the Glory and Blessing of the present Age and the Admiration and Pattern of the next."²¹

²¹ *Serious Proposal*, pp. 3-5.

This solicitude for virtue is to be woman's chief aim, yet like Fénelon, who believed in domestic education rather than conventional, because it kept women in touch with home life and like Madame de Maintenon who would give secular education along with the religious, Mary Astell does not advocate that it be sought by a complete retirement from the life of the world. "No solicitude in the adornation of your selves is discommended," she writes, "provided you employ your care about that which is really yourself and do not neglect that particle of Divinity within you, which must survive. . . . Neither will any pleasure be denied you, who are only desired not to catch at the Shadow and let the substance go."²² The chief end of life, however, is not to attract the eyes of men by bodily adornment, but to use it for the service of God.

Nor does she speak in a complaining and criticizing spirit, for "instead of inquiring why all women are not wise and good," she says: "we have reason to wonder that there are any so. Were the Men as much neglected and as little care taken to cultivate and improve them, perhaps they would be so far from surpassing those whom they now despise, that they themselves would sink into the greatest stupidity and brutality. . . . One would therefore almost think that the wise disposer of all things, foreseeing how unjustly Women are denied opportunities of improvement from without, has therefore by way of compensation endow'd them with greater propensions to Virtue."²³

She points to the fact that many men have argued that women are incapable of acting prudently. That many of them do not act prudently she at no time attempts to deny, but she is unwilling to accept the seventeenth

²² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

century theory as to their incapacity. If there is incapacity, she believes it to be "acquired," and thinks that whatever folly the lives of women show might be avoided, since the cause of the defects under which women labor is a lack of education, for "Women are from their very Infancy debarr'd those advantages with the want of which they are afterwards reproached and nursed up in those vices which will hereafter be upbraided to them. So partial are Men as to expect Bricks when they afford no straw."²⁴

It is this lack of education that brings about untrained judgment in women, that leads them to make wrong choices in life. Were a woman's mind trained, she would know better than to be affected by shallow praises or impudent compliments. "Thus Ignorance and a narrow Education lay the Foundation of Vice, and Imitation, and Custom rear it up."²⁵ To have true piety a woman must have her faith founded upon reason, and not wear it as a fashion to be put off at will. But evils must have a remedy, and, having found the cause of the evils that she sees in her sex, Mary Astell proposes a remedy. "It is to erect a Monastery or if you will (to avoid giving offence to the scrupulous and injudicious, by names which tho' innocent in themselves, have been abus'd by superstitious Practices) we will call it a *Religious Retirement*, and such as shall have a double aspect, being not only a retreat from the World for those who desire that advantage, but likewise, an Institution and previous discipline to fit us to do the greatest good in it, — such an institution as this (if I do not mightily deceive myself) would be the most probable method to amend the present and improve the future Age."²⁶

To this retirement shall be admitted those who are tired

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17. ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32. ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

of the world or who wish to fortify themselves against it. Though the foundation was to be somewhat monastic in form, the purpose was not to be monastic, for the members might return to the world either for marriage or to carry on good works. Its aim was thus to be academic, but academic in the sense of furnishing religious training, and in giving other training only as developing this end. Such a college would provide a calm life passed in this serene retreat beyond the reach of envy, a life devoted to the contemplation of God and the carrying out of good works.

Since religion can never appear in its true beauty except when attended by wisdom and discretion, the scholastic aim, Mary Astell believes, must be to cultivate the understanding, by the teaching not of words but of things. Here she ranges herself upon the side of the moderns in the discussion of ancient and modern learning. Although a student of Latin and to some extent of French, she says that only such languages are necessary as introduce the student to useful authors; hence the student need not know many books, but must study a few carefully chosen ones and know them well. Like Vives, Mary Astell believed the young woman should not read plays and romances, since they make her no wiser in useful knowledge. Elsewhere she approves Jeremy Collier's attack on the stage. The knowledge many ladies have of French, Mary Astell would have them apply in the reading of philosophy, for, unlike George Hickes and many of her contemporaries, she does not feel that philosophy is beyond the capacity of a woman.

The organization she suggests is to be on a religious basis with attention to the sacraments and the fasts of the English Church. But harmless diversions such as music will be admitted, since "Neither God nor wise men

will like us [the women] the better for an affected severity and waspish sourness."²⁷ The lodging, habit, and diet are to be simple that they may not detract from higher contemplation and from the practice of benevolence. Those in charge shall be women of breadth and sweetness who shall lead by example, not by force. Women of lesser social position may have charge of subordinate matters, but the truly important things shall be taught by ladies of rank. Here appears Mary Astell's greatest limitation, in the confining of education to the ladies of noble families. She showed her wider interest, however, in assisting to establish charity schools for girls.

Not only will such a college free women from the temptations of the world, and give opportunities for true friendship, but it will offer certain temporal advantages. It may become a refuge for heiresses, who are hunted for their fortunes, until such times as their relatives shall provide satisfactory marriages for them. It will give an opportunity for the education of the daughters of large families, where dowries are limited, and it will provide for the daughters of decayed gentlewomen by giving them an opportunity to secure a living by teaching there. At no time, however, is the suggestion made that those entering may not go back to the world from their retirement.

At this point Mary Astell discusses many of the current objections to the education of women. She has no admiration for the pedant, man or woman. A learned education will not make women vain, she insists, if they have the substance not the show of knowledge, but "a smattering in learning may, for it has this effect on the men, none so dogmatical and so forward to shew their parts as your little Pretenders to Science."²⁸

She emphasizes the idea that the mother, who has great

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

power in forming the child, can be educated to be of service to men. "If she do not make the child, all will agree that she have the power to mar him."²⁹ Here Mary Astell's educational theory falls in line with that of Plato, Erasmus, and Fénelon. Like Vives, she believes that a woman's piety, if used with discretion, may go far to reclaim a bad husband, but she does not for that reason advocate marriage as a pious duty. In her discussion she does not suggest education as a substitute for marriage, but as a protection to a woman against an unhappy or a dishonorable marriage. With the satirists and moralists of the time she saw the dangers to the unmarried as well as the married woman whose mind and heart were not filled with deeper interests.

"For the poor Lady, having past the prime of her years in Gait and Company, in running the Circle of all the vanities of the Town, having spread all her nets and used all her arts for Conquest, and finding that the Bait fails where she would have it take; and having all this while been so over-careful of her Body, that she had no time to improve her Mind, which therefore affords her no safe retreat, now she meets with Disappointments abroad, and growing every day more and more sensible that the respect which us'd to be paid her decays as fast as her Beauty; quite terrified with the dreadful name of old maid, which yet none but Fools will reproach her with, nor any wise woman be afraid of, to avoid this terrible *Mormo*, and the scoffs that are thrown on superannuated Virgins, she flies to some dishonourable match as her last, tho' much mistaken Refuge, to the disgrace of her Family, and her own irreparable Ruin."³⁰

There lies but one danger to marriage in the education of woman, "that the wife be more knowing than her hus-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

band, but if she be 'tis his own fault, since he wants no opportunities of improvement unless he be a natural Block-head, and then such an one will need a wise woman to govern him, whose prudence will conceal it from public observation and at once both cover and supply his defects."³¹ In the latter idea she falls in line with Lord Halifax. Then she states, in a way not exceeded by any modern writer on the subject, the true basis of marriage: "Such an education will put the stability of marriage on a basis not furnished by the charms of the wife, but on a basis furnished by veneration and esteem."

Since the plan for a college for women promises to do much for their advancement, Mary Astell appeals in a very modern fashion for money with which to finance the enterprise.

"To close all, if this Proposal which is but a rough draught and rude essay, and which made much more beautiful by a better Pen, give occasion to wiser heads to improve and perfect it, I have my end. For imperfect as it is, it seems so desirable, that she who drew the scheme is full of hopes it will not want kind hands to perform and compleat it."³²

In 1697 the second part of *A Serious Proposal* was published. Instead of being dedicated to Ladies in general as Part I was, it was addressed to Princess Anne of Denmark with a hint that the Princess might think the design worthy of encouragement. Then Mary Astell turned to the ladies, calling upon them to remove by their intellectual and moral activity the prejudices of society. She had already in Part I proved women equal to the task; now she sought to stir them into carrying out their own development.

Her entire aim is to give women such basis for their

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

■ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

knowledge that their piety and their belief in the Church may not be shaken, for, unlike Lord Halifax and later Rousseau, Mary Astell would have women reason out belief for themselves and not take that imposed upon them by their fathers or their husbands. All women have the rudiments of knowledge (however they come by them), and they must determine their acts for themselves. It may be necessary to follow custom until reason is trained, but they must take care not to rely too much upon custom. The limitations of prejudice and sloth must be removed, and the search for knowledge followed patiently through life.

The rest of Part II is devoted to showing how knowledge must be sought through a study of the individual's own understanding. Mary Astell makes no attempt to decide whether judgment belongs to the understanding or to the will, but she aims to show the defects of the thinking faculty. She does not discuss the mooted questions of philosophy at this point but urges her reader to decide whether or not she can reason rationally about a dress, an intrigue, an estate. If so, then she needs only to train her mind to have it capable of reasoning concerning better things. The directions as to methods of thinking are formulated in six rules derived from those of Descartes.

The next section discusses the technique of expression as applied to the education of women. A knowledge of the rules of rhetoric is necessary for the furthering of right reason. A sense of truth must be cultivated, for the woman believing fully in her subject will lack no words to express her ideas; hence "the way to be good Orators is to be good Christians."³³ From Mary Astell's standpoint, a study of pronunciation, as she calls public speaking, is unnecessary, since nature has given women voices

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

sufficient for conversation, and she would not have them take part in anything of a public nature. Here she falls in line with the theories of the Italian Leonardo Bruni, and, to a certain extent, with Anne Schurman, but is in opposition to the views expressed by the Frenchman, Poulain de la Barre,³⁴ who would allow women in general to follow the Italian women in the practice as well as the theory of politics and in addition would allow them to preach.

The purpose of all this acquisition of knowledge is right living, and, since to woman as well as to man that is the great business of life, no help should be denied her, if she is placed in such a station in life as to have capacity for thought.

The good woman will find use for her knowledge not only in the conduct of her own soul but in the care of her family, and in her most important duty, the education of children, especially as the fathers are too busy to attend to such duties.³⁵ The education of children, more-

³⁴ Cf. Appendix II, p. 177.

³⁵ *Serious Proposal*, pp. 209-210.

"Education of children is a most necessary employment, perhaps the chief of those who have any. But it is as difficult as it is excellent when well performed: and I question not but that the mistakes which are made in it are a principle cause of that Folly and Vice which is so much complained of and so little mended. Now thus at least the foundation of it should be laid by the Mother, for Fathers find other business: they will not be confined to such a laborious work, they have not such opportunities of serving a child's temper, nor are the greatest part of 'em like to do much good, since precepts contradicted by example seldom prove effectual. Neither are strangers so proper for it, because hardly anything besides paternal affection can sufficiently quicken the care of performing, and sweeten the labor of such a task. But tenderness alone will never discharge it well. She who would do it must thoroughly understand Human Nature, know how to manage different Tempers, prudently, be mistress of her own and be able to bear with

over, requires not only tenderness but knowledge. To the unmarried woman, also, broader education will bring wider opportunities, since the world lies ahead of her as a field for service.³⁶

The concluding chapter deals with the regulation of the will and the government of the passions according to the knowledge obtained. Like Descartes Mary Astell ascribes the passions to certain movements of the blood and animal spirits, which often clog the mind. The senses, as God's work, are not to be condemned, as they contribute to the comfort of the body, but they are to be kept under by meditation and by the avoidance of anything, such as theatrical shows, that will stir them up, thereby depriving the soul of its divine serenity. Reason is, however, no enemy to nature or to pleasure, but perfects one and ennobles the other.

Platonist as Mary Astell shows herself in a succeeding Platonic rhapsody, she warns the religious enthusiast not to mistake fits of passion for a spirit of piety and devotion. Nor must the moody Christian tincture her religion with her disposition, nor let her love of God occupy her until she becomes peevish to her neighbor, but, instead of spending all her time in devotion, she should employ a part of it in doing good to her fellow men.

Many points in Mary Astell's discussion of the education of women are the stereotyped points of the day, as the

all the little humours and follies of youth. Neither Severity nor Lenity are to be always used: it would ruin some to be treated in that manner which is fit for others, as mildness makes some ungovernable and as she is therefore in many from which nothing but Terrors can rouse them. So sharp Reproofs and solemn Lectures serve to no purpose but to harden others, in faults from which they might be won by an agreeable address and tender application.

³⁶ Cf. Anne Schurman, *The Learned Maid*, London, 1695, p. 31.

discussion of the characteristics of the ideal women, self-love as an underlying evil in the lives of women, and reason as a basis of character. The development of her ideas can be traced through Vives, Richard Brathwayte, the voluminous church literature of the day, such as Bishop Taylor's *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*, and the pamphlets written with a more specifically educational purpose, of which *The Ladies' Calling* is perhaps the most important. The second half of *The Serious Proposal* shows definite influence of the philosophy of Descartes and the investigations of Locke. But the aim and point of view in the discussion is different.

The first part of the work cleared the ground for action by showing women capable of education if prejudice were removed, and by discussing the possible method of securing training for them. The second part aimed to give the method of intellectual development necessary to attain the end of all education, — eternal happiness. Part I had dealt with former methods in the education of women, and had shown that what little education was given them was open to the same criticism as that of men. Part II followed in large measure the Cartesian philosophy with an acceptance of the Platonic theory of ideas as prototypes, but added Locke's theory of simple ideas and of judgments as drawn from these ideas.

In opposition to Locke, Mary Astell believed in innate ideas, although she denied a difference in capacity in men and women. Such questions as whether judgment belongs to the understanding or to the will, whether minds are limited by capacity or by bodily organs, she disregarded as unnecessarily controversial. She accepted the Cartesian dualism of soul and body, at the same time finding an interaction between the two. She kept the theory of mind and body retained by Descartes, in which the intellectual,

to her the spiritual, is represented as the true type of life and the body is to be kept under. She predicated a knowledge of God from her own being and her resulting idea of such a being. At times the Platonism of her period appears in her rhapsodies.

In educational theory she is reasonable beyond many of her contemporaries. Whatever her attitude toward Locke, she is much influenced by him. Her contribution to the history of education lies not in new theories scientifically worked out, nor in principles as to the education of women, but in her practical application of her ideas and in her clear view of the social possibilities lying back of the education of women and of the economic changes necessary to bring about new ends. Many religious writers had complained of the position of widows and of the unmarried daughters in families of rank where daughters were too numerous to be supplied with satisfactory dowries: it was Mary Astell's province, when public sentiment was growing against the idea that women should marry for a home no matter what the character of the man, to suggest a way through which this might be avoided, not only by providing a place for education, but by planning that the educated young woman should remain there, teaching, until her own marriage. Thus she would avoid the economic necessity of an unhappy marriage and the license and frivolity to which the unemployed of both sexes were liable.

Mary Astell's opponents objected to the plan as monastic, and certain elements in her idea do seem to reach back to monastic times, however far from the conventional method she had gone. The change in the monastic system to adapt it to modern needs had taken place in the sixteenth century in the education of men, when the religious foundations were changed to such secular ones as the

schools for men. Nor was the desire for some provision for women an entirely new idea at Mary Astell's time.³⁷ With the downfall of the nunneries and the reform attitude

³⁷ Entirely apart from this development but paralleling it in an interesting manner is the work of Mary Ward, already mentioned. Like Mary Astell she believed that in troublesome times women could remain faithful to religion only by having knowledge, and that women are capable of acquiring that knowledge. To her the "troublesome times" were those of the catholic persecution in the early seventeenth century. To Mary Astell they were the period of scepticism and irreligion of the later part of the century. The independence of viewpoint and clearness of thought of the two is not far different. Mary Ward's aim was only one step nearer monasticism than was Mary Astell's, "to embrace the religious state and at the same time to devote ourselves according to our slender capacity to the performance of those works of Christian charity towards our neighbor that cannot be undertaken in convents." She desired "a mixed kind of life, partly in the world, partly in the cloister," "that by this means we may more easily instruct virgins and young girls from their earliest years in piety, Christian morals, and the liberal arts, that they may afterwards according to their respective vocations, profitably embrace either the secular or the religious state." The style of dress was to be simple, in general conformed most nearly to that worn by virtuous ladies in those countries or provinces where the members of the Institute resided.³⁸ Like Mary Astell she stood for the intellectual equality of men and women. "Fervour is not placed in feelings," she said in a speech made at St. Omer, "but in a will to do well, which women may have as well as men. There is no such difference between men and women that women may not do great things as we have seen by example of many saints who have done great things. And I hope in God it will be seen that women in time to come will do much."

"Heretofore we have been told by men we must believe. It is true we must: but let us be wise, and know what we are to believe and what not, and not to be made to think we can do nothing."

"If women were made so inferior to men in all things, why were they not exempted in all things as they were in some? I confess wives

³⁸ Mary Catherine Elizabeth Chambers, *The Life of Mary Ward*, 1884, 2 vols. Vol. I, p. 377.

that, as the old English law expressed it, regarded every woman as married or as about to be married,⁴⁰ there seemed to be no place economically or intellectually for the unmarried women, who, however, still continued to exist, and, as has been shown by the satires and the sermons of the latter half of the seventeenth century, had become a distinct type, aimless and dissatisfied.

The belief that virginity is the noblest ideal of life did not entirely die with the nunneries, but in high church circles it survived throughout the seventeenth century. Even the educational writer, Richard Brathwayte, could say in 1631, in criticizing indiscreetness, "Of such I speake, who have not dedicated their dayes to Virginity, which is such a Condition as it aspires to an Angelical perfection. Good, (saith venerable Bede) is conjugall chastity; better is viduall continency, but best is the perfection of Virginity. Yea, Virginity exceeds the condition of humane nature, being that, by which man resembles an Angelicall Creature. We reade likewise that the *unicorn* when hee can be taken by no force nor subtil Engine, will rest and repose in the Lap of a Virgin."⁴¹

Owen Feltham has somewhat of a leaning toward the ideal of a celibate life, but would have no avowed organizations requiring it. His statement is qualified by his

are to be subjected to their husbands. Men are head of the Church, women are not to administer sacraments, nor preach in public churches, but in all other things, wherein are we so inferior to other creatures, that they should term us but 'women'? For what think you of this word 'but women' but as if we were in all things inferior to some other creature, which I suppose to be man! which I dare to be bold to say is a lie: and respect to the good Father may say it is an error."³⁹

³⁹ *Ibid.* Vol. I, p. 410.

⁴⁰ *The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights*, London, 1632. Preface.

⁴¹ Richard Brathwayte, *The English Gentlewoman*, 1631, pp. 146-147,

second thought. "But should all live thus, a hundred years would make the world a desart."⁴²

There were then suggested among the leaders of the intellectual life of the people two ideals for women, — a single state devoted to the worship of God, and the married state of subjection to the husband in God. The problem arising was what should be the position of those who came under neither.

Through the middle of the century the acceptance of the first attitude was attended with great difficulties in the time of protestant power. The most famous group of women attempting it was that formed by the Ferrar nieces at Little Gidding. Their education was not limited to religious books, as they were acquainted with ancient and modern history, grammar, music, and arithmetic, besides fair writing, medicine, embroidery, book-binding. Nicholas Ferrar was insistent upon celibacy only for himself, and wished his nieces to marry. A letter from Anne Collett to her uncle Nicholas Ferrar, quoted by Carter (the originals are in Magdalen College, Cambridge) in 1630, gave up the idea of marriage, and again in 1631 she wrote a second time: "Touching my condission of life, such content do I find, I neither wish or desire any change in it; but as God may please, with my Parents' leave, to give me grace and strength, that I may spend the remainder of my days without greater encumbrances of this worlde, which doe of necessitie accompany a married Estate;"⁴³

At the election of Mary Collett as "Mother" in "The Academy" of the household, occurred a discussion that shows the varying attitudes of the women themselves.

⁴² Owen Feltham. *Resolves, Divine, Moral, Political, with several new additions, etc.*, London, 1709, p. 202.

⁴³ T. T. Carter, *Nicholas Ferrar his Household and his Friends*, London, 1892, p. 139.

"But will not the setting of Mother to the Mayd make a discord in musick (sayd the Guardian).

"In the old time (sayd the Moderatour) (and I doe not think the musitians of this Age are better Artists) there was nothing esteemed to make sweetier harmonie. Theres a Generation and conception of the mind as well as the body, and sons and Daughters are to be begotten in Christ Jesus as well as in the Flesh. To them, therefore, that choose barrenes of body for more fruitfulnes of the mind, the Names of Father and Mother are no lesse truly, but farre more eminently due then to those who, by corporal pro-creation, uphold mankind. My voice, therefore, goes with you both for the same person and Name which you have propounded." ⁴⁴

The other sisters cannot entirely accept the statement. Cheerefull replies:

"Your virgin Estate serves better then Wedlock to the attainment of Perfection, but doth not more necessarily require it. Wee would not, with the world to boote, take husbands, to have lesse Interest in God by that means. Its the hope of better serving God and the firmer unitiment unto him that inclines our Judgments to the married condition." ⁴⁵

Affectionate urges that a married woman needs even more than the single one the support of religion in her duties. ⁴⁶

Mary and Anne Collett carried their asceticism almost to the point of establishing a nunnery. Bishop Hacket gives an account of the incident in his *Memoirs of Archbishop Williams*, although a somewhat different account is given by Mr. Carter in a letter of Lenton's. Bishop

⁴⁴ *The Story Books of Little Gidding*, 1631-2, 1899, pp. 164-165.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Hacket's report is that rumors had come to Bishop Williams of a monastic establishment at Little Gidding. He visited the place, was impressed by the piety of its members, and gave them his blessing. "But after this approbation," says the narrator, "some of them could not see when they were well. For two Daughters of that Family came to the Bishop, offer'd themselves to be veil'd virgins, and to take upon them the vow of perpetual chastity with the solemnity of the Episcopal Blessing and Ratification: whom he admonished very fatherly that they knew now what they went about; that they had no promise to confirm that Grace unto them. Let the younger women marry was the best advice, that they might not be lead into temptation. And that they might not forget what he taught them, he drew up his Judgment in three sheets of paper and sent it home to them. And one of the Gentlewomen was afterwards well married."⁴⁷

The reputation of Little Gidding did not escape so easily at the hands of a puritanical visitor who recommended in a pamphlet published in 1641 that Parliament should investigate the foundation. The writer had visited Little Gidding and had talked with Nicholas Ferrar, who had denied that the place was a nunnery, and his nieces nuns, but "he confessed that two of his Nieces had lived the one thirtie, the other thirty and two years virgins, and so resolved to continue (as he hoped they would) to give themselves to Fasting and Prayers; but had made no vows."⁴⁸ The investigator did not accept this statement since he felt the Ferrar establishment savored too much of popery.⁴⁹

Lady Lettice, Vicountess of Falkland, another devout

⁴⁷ *Bishop Hacket, Memoirs of Archbishop Williams*, 1715, p. 156.

⁴⁸ *The Arminian Nunnery, etc.*, 1641, p. 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

churchwoman, worked out somewhat the same method for her household. The children of her charity school and her own household were required to read prayers twice daily, although her opponents criticized this as a popish tendency.⁵⁰ She desired to carry her educational plans further, but was prevented by the condition of the times. Her biographer shows how far-sighted her plans were.

"Neither was her case of improving others confined to the present age; designes and projects she had also for posterity, of setting up schools, and manufacture trades in the Parish. But that magnificent and most religious contrivement, that there might be places for the education of young Gentlewomen, and for retirement of Widows (as Colleges and Inns of Court and Chancery are for men) in several parts of the Kingdom. This was much in her thoughts, hoping thereby that learning and religion might flourish more in her own Sex than hither-to-for, having such opportunities to serve the Lord without distraction: A project this adequate to the wisdom and piety of this Mother in Israel, and not beyond the power and interest she had with great ones to have affected it."⁵¹

A relation evidently existed between the establishment at Little Gidding and Lettice Falkland's plans for Great Tew, as her chaplain when she was Lettice Cary, later her biographer, was brother to the Edmond Duncon sent from Little Gidding to George Herbert's death bed in 1633, and had lived with the Ferrars some years.⁵²

A still later example of the same tendency to retire from the world for religious contemplation and acts of

⁵⁰ John Duncon, *The Vertuous Holy Christian Life and Death of the late Lady Lettice, Vi-countess of Falkland*, London, 1653, p. 42.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁵² John Duncon, *Lady Lettice, Vi-countess Falkland*, [Ed. by M. F. Howard] London, 1908, pp. 7 & 27.

charity is given in the lives of the ladies of Naish Court, Mary and Anne Kemys. After the death of their mother, in 1683, they went from Glamorganshire to Naish, where they lived until their deaths in 1708. Here they established a kind of Anglican sisterhood after the Little Gidding type, and were often visited by Bishop Ken. Although unmarried himself, Bishop Ken seems to have favored family rather than monastic life; yet he acted as spiritual guide and counselor to these ladies. The general estimate of their house appears in a letter from Dr. Smith to Bishop Ken, under the date of 1707.

"But the Christmas festival now approaching I presume that you have made your retreat from the noise and hurry of a palace, open to all comers of fashion and quality to the private seat of the good Ladyes whch has a better pretense to the title of a Religious House than those so called in Popish countryes. Superstition, opinion of merit, and forced vowes take off very much from the pure spirit of devotion and render their restraint tedious and irksome. But these good Ladies are happy under your conduct and are by an uninterrupted course of piety elevated above all the gaudy pompes and vanities of the world and enjoy all the comforts and satisfactions and serenity of mind to be wished for and attained on this side of heaven in their solitudes."⁵³

Nor was the growing feeling that a place should be provided for women limited to the better class of women themselves. Thomas Fuller in the middle of the seventeenth century looked back with interest upon the educational side of the monastic foundations.

"There were good she schools wherein the girls and maids of the neighborhood were taught to read and work: and sometimes a little Latin was taught them therein. Yea,

⁵³ James Thomas Round, *Works of Bishop Ken*, London, 1838, p. 96.

give me leave to say, if feminine foundations had still continued, provided no vow were obtruded upon them, (virginity is least kept where it is most constrained), haply the weaker sex, besides the avoiding modern inconveniences, might be heightened to a higher perfection than hitherto hath been attained.”⁵⁴

In *The Ladies' Calling*, a suggestion had been made toward religious orders. The author does not look with disfavor upon the Roman Catholic custom but wishes there might be some such opportunity given to English women who desire to devote themselves to the service of God. He agrees with the generally received opinion that “An old Maid is now thought such a curse as no poetic fury can exceed, looked on as the most calamitous creature in nature,”⁵⁵ but would except those who remain unmarried to devote themselves to the service of God. Even this opinion might be changed he believes, “If the superannuated Virgins would behave themselves with Gravity and Reservedness, addict themselves to the strictest virtue and piety,” and thus “they would give the world some cause to believe 'twas not their necessity but their choice which kept them unmarried. That they were pre-engaged to a better Amour, espoused to the Spiritual Bridegroom, and this would give them among the sober sort, at least the reverence and esteem of matrons.”⁵⁶

With some such religious background, but with a more vigorous conception of the immediate needs of woman, Mary Astell, through her life in the world and practical

⁵⁴ The number and breadth of schools for women under monasticism is denied in *Cyclopedia of Education*, 1913. Vol. V, p. 798. Cf. however Lina Eskenstein, *Woman Under Monasticism*, 1896, p. 378. Thomas Fuller, *Church History of Great Britain*, 5 vols. Vol. 3, p. 336.

⁵⁵ *The Ladies' Calling*, p. 158.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

touch with affairs both secular and religious and her keen sense of the spiritual impotency of many women of great promise, made her suggestion toward a foundation for the education of women, backed by religious principles it is true, but not limited to religious education, requiring no vows, yet offering a home for unmarried women until the time of marriage or the completion of a training that should lead them to become self-supporting.

How it was received by Bishop Burnet has already been discussed. A distant relative of his, Thomas Burnet of Kemny in a gossipy letter to the Electress Sophia written from London, July 29, 1697, regarding the theories of Platonism, mentions Mary Astell.

"The question continues concerning the love we owe to God: whether it ought to be of pure complacencie and delectationes without any relatione to our own interest and advantage or iff the true love of God will admitt self-interest and that which they call love of desire. The dispute did first begin twixt Mr. Norris a divine near Salisbury, and mistris Ash, a young Ladie of extraordinary piety and knowledge as any of the age. Many letters upon this subject have passed betwixt Mr. Norris and her. Her two little books of proposals to the Ladies, the First & Second parts, shew both her zeal and judgment in thee advyces given to her sex, for the reformation of manners, living, studies, and conversations of the ladies. She is not above 22 years yet, and wrote those advyces several years before."

In 1697 appeared Defoe's well known *Essay upon Projects* with its suggestion as to the education of women. In a somewhat humorous way he resents the fact that Mary Astell has suggested a project for the education of women, since he had thought out the matter sometime earlier than she but had not written it down.

He regrets the usual attitude taken in regard to the education of women, and questions pointedly: "What has woman done to forfeit the privilege of being taught?" After showing the fallacy of Mary Astell's method as seen from his dissenting point of view, he makes his own suggestions.

"The capacities of women are supposed to be greater, and their senses quicker, than those of the men, — and what they might have been capable of being bred to, is plain from some instances of female wit, which this age is not without, which upbraids us with injustice, and looks as if we denied women the advantage of education for fear they should vie with the men in their improvements. To remove this objection and that women might have at least a needful opportunity of education in all sorts of useful learning, I propose the draught of an academy for that purpose.

"I know 'tis dangerous to make public appearances of the sex, — they are not either to be confined or exposed; the first will disagree with their inclinations, and the last with their reputations, and therefore it is somewhat difficult; and I doubt a method proposed by an ingenious lady, in a little book called *Advice to the Ladies*, would be found impracticable: for, saving my respect to the sex, the levity, which perhaps is a little peculiar to them, at least in their youth, will not bear constraint: and I am satisfied nothing but the height of bigotry can keep up a nunnery. Women are extravagantly desirous of going to heaven, and will punish their pretty bodies to get thither: but nothing else will do it, and even in that case sometimes it falls out that Nature will prevail.

"When I talk, therefore, of an academy for women, I mean both the model, the teaching, and the government, different from what is proposed by that ingenious lady,

for whose proposal I have a very great esteem, and also a great opinion of her wit, — different, too, from all sorts of religious confinement, and, above all, from vows of celibacy.

“Wherefore the academy I propose should differ but little from public schools, wherein such ladies as were willing to study, should have all the advantages of learning suitable to their genius.

“But since some severities of discipline more than ordinary would be absolutely necessary to preserve the reputation of the house, that persons of quality and fortune might not be afraid to venture their children thither, I shall venture to make a small scheme by way of essay.”

His plan gives somewhat more liberty to women, yet still implies the necessity for close guardianship. He rejects for women of the period the ideal that seems to include no education.

“And herein,” he continues, “is it that I take upon me to make such a bold assertion, that all the world are mistaken in their practice about women; for I cannot think that God Almighty ever made them so delicate, so glorious creatures, and furnished them with such charmes so agreeable and delightful to man with souls capable of the same accomplishments with men, and all only to be stewards of our houses, cooks and slaves.

“Not that I am for exalting the female government in the least, — but, in short, I would have men take women for companions and educate them to be fit for it.”

“A woman of sense and breeding will scorn as much to encroach upon the prerogative of the man, as a man of sense will scorn to oppress the weakness of the woman.”

A Protestant Monastery, a pamphlet by George Wheeler printed in 1698, mentioned Mary Astell. It is a suggestion toward a plan of devotion for families, the idea being based

upon the book of devotions by Bishop Dupper. The introduction suggests that it may be used in families or alone, "Thus Widows and Virgins and all single Persons, who have not the Convenience and Happiness of the United Devotions of an unanimous Family." In the fourth chapter monasteries for women are discussed and approved if conducted under proper rule, such as that members shall be permitted to marry under suitable conditions. "Such nunneries as these," Wheler thinks, "would be no ways prejudicial, but many ways profitable to the State, and creditable to the Church. For their industry would hinder them from being burdensome to the one and their exemplary Virtue and Piety would be a Reputation to the other, whereas now-a-days how many families are their so burdened with Daughters their Parents cannot either for want of beauty or money, dispose of in marriage, or in any other decent manner provide for, yet are they obliged to maintain them according to their Quality till usually at their Decease they leave them without habitation and many times scarce a quarter enough to keep them decently." Wheler had practically adopted Mary Astell's idea, for he believed that through such an institution women would be cared for and at the same time taught to provide for themselves, and, as a result, "as they may excel in all commendable qualities, might become a portion to themselves without the help of their Relations, and, indeed, may deserve to be purchased with more money than now-a-days. Men strive to get portion as a recompence, for taking them off their wearied Parents' hands, who after an extraordinary charge in breeding and keeping them, till, many times their age which is their ornament becomes their reproach, are forced to marry them below themselves without prospect either of credit or advantages by them."

To Mary Astell Wheler gives credit for these ideas by referring to "*A Serious Proposal* written by an ingenious Lady."⁵⁷

Evelyn, Mary Astell's first biographer, approved her plan in *Numismata*, published 1697, where he classed her as worthy of having her name handed down to future generations.

"Besides what lately she [Mary Astell] proposed to the virtuous of her Sex to show by her own Example what great things and Excellencies it is capable of and which calls to mind the Lady of the Protestant Monastery, Mrs. Ferrar, not long since at Gedding in Huntingtonshire; the history whereof we have at large written by Dr. Hacket. Not without my hearty wishes that at the first Reformation in this Kingdom, some of these demolished Religious Foundations had been spared both for Men and Women; where single persons devoutly inclined might have retired and lived without Reproach, or ensnaring Vows: tho' under such Restraint and Religious Rules as could not but have been approved by the most averse to Popery or superstition and, as I have heard, is at this Day practised among the Evangelical Churches in Germany. And what should still forbid us to promote the same Example, and begin such foundations I am to learn more solid reasons for, than I confess, as yet I have."⁵⁸

Another churchman besides Bishop Burnet discussed Mary Astell's plans. George Hickes was drawn to it by his interest both in the education of women and in that of men. In *The Gentleman Instructed* he discussed the question of nunneries for women.⁵⁹ He would have a

⁵⁷ *A Protestant Monastery*, London, 1698, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁸ John Evelyn, *Numismata*, 1697, p. 265.

⁵⁹ George Hickes, *The Gentleman Instructed*, London, 1722. Supplement to Part I, Dialogue IV.

woman educated for the home. "You may season work with reading," he says, "for though women should not pretend to commence Doctors, yet I would not have 'em forswear knowledge, nor make a vow of stupidity."⁶⁰ "Indeed 'tis not necessary to rival the Knowledge of the Sybils, nor the science of the Muses, she should not wade too deep into controversies nor soar as high as Divinity. These studies lie out of a Lady's way: They fly up to the head, and not only intoxicate weak brains but turn them."

George Hickes further showed his interest by including Mary Astell's *Serious Proposal* in a list of books suitable for English readers which he substituted for a list made by Fénelon.

"Those [books] which I would recommend to a young lady next to the Holy Scriptures are, *The Whole Duty of Man*, *The Ladies Calling*, and the *Government of the Tongue*, Dr. Cave's *Primitive Christianity* to give an idea of the Lives and Manners of the Antient Christians, with which she may join the *Lives of the Apostles*, and *A Companion for the Festivals of the Church of England, with Collects and Prayers for each Solemnity* by Robert Nelson, Esq., which will furnish her with Matter for her reflection upon the Days dedicated to their Memories. She ought likewise not to be unacquainted with *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their truest and greatest Interest*, in 2 parts: as also with *The Christian Religion as professed by a Daughter of the Church of England*. These being written by one of her own Sex, may probably serve to make a deeper impression upon her."⁶¹

A later book with a very modern tone was Robert

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

⁶¹ *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter*. By the author of *Telemachus* . . . Done into English and Revised by Dr. George Hickes. 2nd ed. London, 1708, p. 288.

Nelson's *An Addresse to Persons of Quality and Estate*, in which he showed how they might use their wealth properly. Besides suggesting trade schools, normal schools for men and women, schemes for lending to the poor in need and for relieving poor prisoners, he says:

"We have not Houses for the Reception of Ladies and Gentlewomen, beyond Boarding-schools in order to their improvement both in Knowledge and Piety, though there was some years ago a *Proposal* to Ladies for this and, made by a very Ingenious Gentlewoman, which was then well approved by several ladies and others."⁶²

Such commendation and thoughtful consideration should have aided Mary Astell's proposal to bear immediate fruit, but the time was not yet ripe. It was a hundred and fifty years before her vision, hampered in its inception by tradition, hindered by ridicule and circumstance was fulfilled in ways far beyond her out-reaching imagination. That her thought influenced the later development is perhaps too much to claim; yet women have found some of the opportunities she desired for them not only in the colleges of the present day, but perhaps even nearer to her own ideal in the sisterhoods of the Anglican Church. A very recent suggestion has been made that many of the insistent problems aroused by the changing economic position of women would be settled were lay sisterhoods planned for unmarried women,—planned so as to give them an opportunity for self-support and social service without bringing them into competition with men. Whatever the value of the forms that Mary Astell's idea has taken, or however narrow they seem to-day, she stands out as one of the earliest English women to plan constructively for her sex.

⁶² Robert Nelson, *An Address to Persons of Quality*, 1715, p. 213.

CHAPTER III

PAMPHLETS ON MARRIAGE

THE question of woman's place in marriage was a somewhat puzzling one in the latter half of the seventeenth century. The norm of marriage had been disturbed with the changing educational and religious problems of the previous hundred years. Under a standardization of marriage ideals, the selection of a husband or wife was a simple process, and the after-relation self-evident. The woman having pre-eminently the qualities of the ideal was the one to be selected and the business relationship of marriage would go merrily on. But, when ideals conflicted, what was to be done? In the sixteenth century there had been two possibilities open to women, marriage and a celibate religious life. With the protestant insistence on marriage and the withdrawal of the celibate idea for men and women from its high place in the religious life, there had been removed from the unmarried woman the one sphere open to her, even though in later times that refuge itself had degenerated.

The contempt felt by seventeenth century writers for women, in contrast to the growing spirit of democracy, which must eventually permeate all classes, was having its influence. In spite of all opposition or because of it, women were becoming self-conscious. They were no longer willing to accept the attitude of Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, of Milton who looked at marriage and divorce from the point of view of the man only, of

Sir Thomas Browne, who found woman formed from the rib of a man and a crooked piece at that. In fact the rib theory of creation played an important part in seventeenth century theology and satire, and unfortunately it is hard at times to tell where satire ends and theology begins.¹ The broadsides of the seventeenth century give a picture of marriage coarser by far than that of the mediaeval satires because of the loss of naïveté of the earlier period.

But there were high ideals among individuals. An early attractive treatise showing this is the one addressed by Cornelius Agrippa to those contemplating matrimony. Its dedication runs *To the Right Worshipful and his speciall good maister, Maister Gregory Cromwell, son to the ryght Honorable Lorde Cromwell, Lord privie Seale, David Clapham sendeth gretying.*²

Vives's insistence that marriage should be cloistral and the woman subordinate to her husband, whatever his moral character, became in Richard Brathwayte's sight more noble. To him marriage appeared as a partnership of mind and heart, in which the delight of the mind was part of the joy of marriage. "I never set my affection on marriage," he says, "to strengthen me with friendship; my aim was the woman and the grounds of my love were her mind's endowments."³ Owen Feltham, whose *Resolves* published about 1628 had reached its twelfth edition by 1709, was equally liberal. "Questionless, a woman with a

¹ *Female Excellence*, 1679, p. 4: "Her crooked mind's a metaphor of Hell."

² "Thou, therefore who soever thou arte, that wylt take a wyfe, let love be the cause not substance of goodes, choose a wyfe not a garment let thy wyfe be maryed unto thee, not her dowrye. . . . And let not her be subject unto the, but let her be with the in all truste and counsail, & let her be in thy house, not as a drudge, but as maystresse of the house, in thy householde not as a mayden but a mother." p. 102.

³ Brydges, *Archaea*. Vol. II, (In *Essay on the Five Senses*, p. 82.)

wise soul is the fittest companion for man. . . . It is the crown of blessings, when in one woman a man finds both a wife and a friend." ⁴ In quiet circles there were many homes illustrating the higher type of marriage.

Mary Astell's *Reflections on Marriage* is her attempt to solve the problem. In *The Serious Proposal* she had stated her ideals, which are more fully developed in this pamphlet. Like her previous pamphlets, this one was published anonymously, for several reasons, among others as she says, "To name but one, — Who will care to pull down upon themselves an Hornet's Nest? . . . Bold Truths may pass while the Speaker is Incognito, but are seldom endur'd when he is known; few Minds being strong enough to bear what contradicts their Principles and Practices, without recriminating when they can. And though to tell the Truth be the most Friendly Office, yet whosoever is so hardy as to venture at it, shall be counted an Enemy for so doing." ⁵ The *Reflections* are the fruit of Mary Astell's observations of life around her, but, as she states clearly, she did not intend the essay as a satire upon marriage. Ballard, however, resenting the somewhat scathing remarks upon his own sex, finds the not entirely unmodern explanation that rumor said she was disappointed in a marriage with a clergyman and hence he thinks that in her pamphlet she was taking public vengeance for private wrong.⁶ Her own explanation, however, should

⁴ Owen Feltham, *Resolves*, p. 203.

⁵ *Reflections upon Marriage*. Advertisement.

⁶ Ballard, *Memoirs*, pp. 449-450. "Some people think she has carried her arguments with regard to the *birthrights* and *privileges* of her sex a little too far; and that there is too much warmth of temper discovered in this treatise. But if those persons had known the motive which induced her to write that tract; it might possibly have abated very much of their censure. . . . The motive as I have been informed was her disappointment in a marriage contract with an eminent clergyman."

be sufficient, that she had been recently reading the account of the wrongs of her neighbor the Duchess of Mazarine in *The Duke and Dutchess of Mazarine's Case*, and so had seen forcibly illustrated what disastrous results had come into the life of a woman of great possibilities through her being forced into an unhappy marriage.⁷ The woman of stern morality is not lacking in tenderness toward the unhappy Duchess.

Several things combined to lead Mary Astell to discuss marriage. She had already stated her ideas in *The Serious Proposal*, as has been shown in the previous chapter, and an additional reason for treating the subject was her desire to answer some of the statements made by Lord Halifax in his *Advice to a Daughter*.⁸ That popular treatise seemed unfair to woman in its discussion of her position in marriage. In fact Lord Halifax granted at once the injustice of many of the laws and customs relating to women but in no wise approved of an attempt to change them. "It is one of the *Disadvantages* belonging to your *Sex*, that young Women are seldom permitted to make their own *Choice*," he says; "their Friends Care and Experience are thought safer Guides to them, than their own *Fancies*; and their *Modesty* often forbiddeth them to refuse . . . when their *inward Consent* may not entirely go

⁷ *Reflections*, p. 4. "We sigh, we grieve, that any Person capable of being an Ornament to a Family, and Blessing to the Age, should only serve as an unhappy Shipwreck to point out the Misfortune of an ill Education and unsuitable Marriage, and the inexpressible Danger of seeking Consolation and Relief in anything but Innocence and Virtue.

"They only who have felt it know the Misery of being forc'd to marry where they do not love; of being yok'd for life to a disagreeable Person and imperious Temper, where Ignorance and Folly (the ingredients of a Coxcomb, who is the most unsufferable Fool) tyrannizes over wit and Sense."

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

along with it. In this case there remaineth nothing for them to do, but to endeavour to make that easie which falleth to their *Lot*, and by a wise use of every thing they may dislike in a *Husband*, turn that by degrees to be very supportable, which, if neglected, might in time beget an *Aversion*.”⁹

Unlike the author of *The Ladies' Calling*, Lord Halifax does not give the woman the power of refusal. The basis of the chapter lies in the statement, “You must first lay it down for a Foundation in general, That there is *Inequality in the Sexes*, and that for the better Oeconomy of the World, the *Men*, who were to be the Lawgivers, had the larger share of *Reason* bestow'd upon them; by which means your Sex is the better prepar'd for the *Compliance* that is necessary for the better performance of those *Duties* which seems to be most properly assign'd to it. This looks a little uncourtly at the first appearance; but upon Examination it will be found, that *Nature* is so far from being unjust to you, that she is partial on your side. . . . You have more strength in your *Looks*, than we have in our *Laws*, and more power by your *Tears*, than we have by our *Arguments*.”¹⁰

He acknowledges the laws of marriage to be harsher toward women than toward men, but the sacredness of the institution of marriage necessitates that, even though injustice may be done to the few women who are equal to men. Since *Masculine Domination* is settled by custom and law, his daughter is not vainly to imagine that it will be changed for her sake, but is by wise and dexterous conduct to relieve herself from whatever may seem to be disadvantageous in it. To this end he gives her warning.

Although recognizing the unfairness of a double moral

⁹ Lord Halifax, *Advice to a Daughter*, Oxford, 1912, pp. 7-8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

standard, he claims its necessity for the preservation of families. The greatest fault a woman can commit is, of course, unfaithfulness, but next to that is seeing unfaithfulness in her husband from which "Modesty no less than Prudence ought to restrain her; since such an undecent Complaint makes a Wife much more ridiculous, than the Injury that provoketh her to it."¹¹ In case she marries a drunken husband she is to treat him kindly, taking her consolation in the fact that his weaknesses give her right to govern in his stead and getting what consolation she can from that opportunity, which she might never have had under a sober husband. Ill-humour, sullenness, and covetousness, she is to treat with the same moderation. In the latter case she is to be sure she is not at fault by demanding too much, but, if her husband is really avaricious, she shall work upon him by persuasion, taking advantage of any kind of opportunity. "A fit of *Vanity*, *Ambition*, and sometimes of *Kindness*, shall open and inlarge his *narrow Mind*; a Dose of Wine will work upon this tough humor, and for the time dissolve it. Your business must be, if this Case happeneth, to watch these *critical moments*, and not let one of them slip without making your advantage of it; and a *Wife* may be said to want *skill*, if by these means she is not able to secure her self in a good measure against the Inconveniences this scurvy quality in a *Husband* might bring upon her, except he should be such an incurable *Monster*, as I hope will never fall to your share."¹²

If she get a weak and incompetent husband she at least can have a chance for dominion, as "God Almighty seldom sendeth a *Grievance* without a *Remedy*, or at least such a Mitigation as taketh away a great part of the sting, and the smart of it."¹³

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

"With all this," he adds, "that which you are to pray for, is a *Wise Husband*, one that by knowing how to be a *Master*, for that very reason will not let you feel the weight of it; one whose Authority is so soften'd by his Kindness, that it giveth you ease without abridging your *Liberty*; one that will return so much tenderness for your *Just Esteem* of him, that you will never want *power*, though you will seldom care to use it. Such a *Husband* is as much above all the other Kinds of them, as a *rational subjection* to a Prince, great in himself, is to be preferr'd before the disquiet and uneasiness of *Unlimited Liberty*."¹⁴

With the Duchess of Mazarine's experiences and Lord Halifax's advice in mind Mary Astell opens her pamphlet. The churchwoman at once shows herself. If the woman is already married there is no remedy: she must abide by what she has done. If the man is foolish and wicked, she can only despise even though she may obey. Though he may love her at marriage, passion often cools into indifference, neglect, or perhaps aversion. There is left to the wife in either case only a life of devotion that she may make her trials in this world prepare her better for the next. The woman who seeks relief in the gayeties of a court brings worse troubles upon herself. In this idea of the permanency of marriage Mary Astell is in accord with Lord Halifax and far removed from Milton's liberal attitude toward divorce.

Her remedy for such an unhappy condition lies in prevention, in teaching girls to avoid modern gallants through giving them better education, and thus securing for them happier marriages. "Marriage might," to speak in Mary Astell's language, "recover the Dignity and Felicity of its original Institution; and Men be very happy in a married State, if it be not their own Fault. The great

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

Author of our Being, who does nothing in vain, ordained it as the only honourable Way of continuing our Race; as a Distinction between reasonable Creatures and meer Animals, into which we degrade ourselves, by forsaking the Divine Institution. God ordained it for a Blessing not a Curse; We are foolish as well as wicked, when that which was appointed for mutual Comfort and Assistance, has quite contrary effect through our Folly and Perverseness. Marriage, therefore, notwithstanding all the loose talk of the Town, the Satires of antient, or modern Pretenders to Wit, will never lose its just Esteem from the Wise and Good.

“Though much may be said against this, or that Match; though the Ridiculousness of some, the Wickedness of others, and the Imprudence of too many, may provoke our Wonder, or Scorn, our Indignation or Pity; yet Marriage in general is too sacred to be treated with Disrespect, too venerable to be the Subject of Raillery and Buffoonery. None but the Impious will pretend to refine on a Divine Institution, or suppose there is a better Way for Society and Posterity. Whoever scoffs at this, and by odious Representation would possess the married Pair with a frightful Idea of each other, as if a Wife is nothing better than a Domestic Devil, an Evil he must tolerate for his ^{Conveniency}; and an Husband must of necessity be a Tyrant or a Dupe; has ill Designs on both, and is himself a dangerous Enemy to the Publick, as well as to private Families.”¹⁵

Mary Astell believes that, although marriage is an institution established by God, yet its value as a true social institution may be deduced not from religion merely but from society as its results show. “The Christian Institution of Marriage provides the best that may be for Domestick Quiet and Content, and for the Education of

¹⁵ *Reflections*, pp. 17-18.

Children; so that if we were not under the Tie of Religion, even the Good of Society and civil Duty, would oblige us to what Christianity requires.”¹⁶

One must not come to marriage expecting that it has no difficulties. “There may indeed be Inconveniences in a Married Life; but is there any Condition without them?”¹⁷ Unfortunately many increase the difficulties by seeking the wrong thing in the choice of a wife. Property is not to be despised, as it is necessary to keep the married parties comfortable, but the estate should by no means be the only consideration. The man who marries for an estate and is unhappy should not lay the blame on the marriage. On the other hand, some men chose wives for their beauty or wit. Although love of wit seems to them to be a more spiritual and refined reason, even true wit is not judgment, but only its handmaid. “Thus, whether it be Wit or Beauty that a Man’s in Love with, there are no great Hopes of a lasting Happiness; Beauty with all the Helps of Art, is of no long Date; the more it is help’d, the sooner it decays; and he who only or chiefly chose for Beauty, will in a little Time find the same Reason for another Choice. . . .”¹⁸

When the men who marry for such reasons are eliminated, and those who marry with no reason at all except that “it is the Custom of the World, what others have done before them, that the Family must be kept up, the antient Race preserv’d, and therefore their kind Parents and Guardians choose as they think convenient,”¹⁹ there will be few left to marry for wiser reasons, and few left to deserve their choice.

Women, on the other hand, cannot properly be said to choose, as their only choice is to refuse or to accept

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

what is offered; yet they are not blameless, though perhaps they should be pitied rather than reproved. Men win them by flattering attentions, and they accept. But the burden of an unhappy marriage rests more heavily upon them.

“And as Men have little Reason to expect Happiness when they marry only for the Love of Money, Wit, or Beauty, as has been already shewn, so much less can a Woman expect a tolerable Life, when she goes upon these Considerations. Let the Business be carried as prudently as it can be on the Woman’s Side, a reasonable Man can’t deny that she has by much the harder Bargain,—because she puts her self intirely into her Husband’s Power, and if the Matrimonial Yoke be grievous, neither Law nor Custom afford her that Redress which a Man obtains. He who has Sovereign Power does not value the Provocations of a Rebellious Subject; he knows how to subdue him with Ease, and will make himself obey’d: But Patience and Submission are the only Comforts that are left to a poor People, who groan under Tyranny, unless they are Strong enough to break the Yoke, to Depose and Abdicate, which, I doubt, would not be allow’d of here. For whatever may be said against Passive-Obedience in another Case, I suppose there’s no Man but likes it very well in this,— how much soever Arbitrary Power may be dislik’d on a Throne, not *Milton*, nor B. H[oadly], nor any of the Advocates of Resistance, would cry up Liberty to poor *Female Slaves* or plead for the Lawfulness of Resisting a private Tyranny.”²⁰

Since the wife has no redress, she must obey even her husband’s unreasonable wishes for the sake of peace and quiet. If “The Husband is too Wise to be Advis’d, too Good to be Reform’d, she must follow all his Paces, and

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–45.

tread in all his unreasonable Steps, or there is no Peace, no Quiet for her; she must Obey with the greatest Exactness, 'tis in vain to expect any manner of Compliance on his Side, and the more she complies, the more she may.'²¹

In marriage the woman has not the relief that the man has. If her temper is erratic, her husband can find rest away from home, but "her Business and Entertainment are at home; and tho' he makes it ever so uneasy to her, she must be content, and make her best on't. She who elects a Monarch for Life, who gives him an Authority, she cannot recall, however he misapply it, who puts her Fortune and Person entirely in his Power, nay, even the very Desires of her Heart, according to some learned Casuists, so as that it is not lawful to Will or Desire any Thing but what he approves and allows, had need be very sure that she does not make a Fool her Head, nor a Vicious Man her Guide and Pattern; she had best stay till she can meet with one who has the government of his own Passions, and has duly regulated his own Desires, since he is to have such an absolute Power over hers."²²

It is more incumbent upon a woman, therefore, to choose wisely. Did she choose without merely following custom she might think twice before making a decision and ask: "Is this the Lord and Master to whom I am to promise Love, Honour, and Obedience. What can be the Object of Love but Amiable Qualities, the Image of the Deity impressed upon a generous and godlike Mind, a Mind that is above this World . . . a Mind that is not full of itself, nor contracted to little private Interests, but which in Imitation of that glorious Pattern it endeavours to copy after, expands and diffuses itself to its utmost Capacity in doing Good."²³

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

"And if a Woman can neither Love nor Honour she does ill in promising to Obey, since she is like to have a crooked Rule to regulate her Actions."²⁴

If a wise woman runs such risks when she marries prudently, according to the world's estimate, in marrying her equal in both education and fortune, how serious must be the position of the girl who chooses, or has chosen for her, a husband who is not her equal. He assumes more authority because she was once his superior and takes charge of her property since custom has given man the power over a woman's property even when her settlement protects her.

"For Covenants between Husband and Wife, like Laws in an arbitrary Government are of little Force, the Will of the Sovereign is All in All."²⁵ Such results happen in an equal marriage. Much more are they found in an unequal one, to which a woman should not degrade herself from the higher position to which she was assigned by God.

How in the face of all these problems must a man choose and what shall lead a woman to accept? The solution is not difficult. "Let the Soul be principally considered, and Regard had in the first place to a good Understanding, a virtuous Mind, and in all other respects let there be as much Equality as may be. If they are good Christians and of suitable Tempers all will be well."²⁶

Even after a suitable match is made, not everything is done. The after conduct must be wise. Husbands may not claim their right to obedience oftener than discretion or good manners will justify. The husband must recognize how much the wife gives up in leaving home and family and putting herself entirely in his power. That man shows the basest ingratitude who can treat her disrespectfully. "What Acknowledgements, what Returns can

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

he make? What Gratitude can be sufficient for such Obligations? She shews her good Opinion of him by the great Trust she reposes in him, and what a Brute must he be who betrays that Trust, or acts any way unworthy of it? Ingratitude is one of the basest Vices, and if a Man's soul is sunk so low as to be guilty of it towards her who has so generously oblig'd him, and who so intirely depends on him, if he can treat her disrespectfully, who has so fully testified her Esteem of him, she must have a Stock of Virtue which he should blush to discern, if she can pay him that Obedience of which he is so unworthy.”²⁷

With mutual respect and consideration, marriage may be successful. “But how can a Man respect his Wife, when he has a contemptible Opinion of her and her Sex, when from his own elevation he looks down on them as void of Understanding, full of Ignorance and Passion, so that Folly, and a Woman are equivalent Terms with him? Can he think there is any Gratitude due to her whose utmost Services he exacts as strict Duty? Because she was made to be Slave to his Will, and has no higher End than to Serve and Obey him?”²⁸

Then follows a statement which, taken by itself, may have rejoiced the hearts of Mary Astell's contemporaries, and perhaps may even rejoice their successors, since it seems to put her in the class of those wise women who recognize men's claims, and do not seek to be equal either in mental power or in authority to the husband under whose sway Providence has so kindly placed them.

“She then who Marries, ought to lay it down for an indisputable Maxim, that her Husband must govern absolutely and intirely, and that she has nothing else to do but to Please and Obey. She must not attempt to divide his Authority, or so much as dispute it; to struggle

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

with her Yoke will only make it gall the more, but must believe him Wise and Good in all respects the best, at least he must be so to her. She who can't do this is no way fit to be a Wife, she may set up for that peculiar Coronet the antient Fathers talk'd of, but is not qualified to receive the great Reward which attends the eminent Exercise of Humility and Self-denial, Patience and Resignation, the Duties that a Wife is call'd to.”²⁹

Unfortunately the seeming seriousness of the statement is somewhat vitiated by the following words: “But some refractory Woman perhaps will say, how can this be? Is It possible for her to believe him Wise and Good, who by a thousand Demonstrations convinces her, and all the World, of the contrary? Did the bare Name of Husband confer Sense on a Man, and the meer being in Authority infallibly qualify him for Government, much might be done. But since a wise Man and a Husband are not terms convertible, and how loth soever one is to own it, Matter of Fact won't allow us to deny, that the Head many times stands in need of the Inferior's Brains to manage it, she must beg leave to be excus'd from such high Thoughts of her Sovereign, and if she submits to his Power, it is not so much Reason as Necessity that compels her.”³⁰

The conclusion inevitable from the facts presented is that the woman must be educated. She alone should not be blamed for folly that is the direct result of her lack of education, when in reality man is at fault in not setting a better guard over those who stand in need of one. In order that men may improve, they are given an object in life, and the secret of true education lies in giving motive power to such an aim. Women, on the contrary, are furnished no higher aim than to get a husband. But

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

they are not taught man's seductions and hence easily fall a prey to his evil devices.

"If a Woman were duly principled, and taught to know the World, especially the true Sentiments that Men have of her, and the Traps they lay for her under so many gilded Compliments, and such a seemingly great Respect, that Disgrace would be prevented which is brought upon too many Families; Women would Marry more discreetly, and demean themselves better in a married State, than some People say they do. The Foundation, indeed, ought to be laid deep and strong, she should be made a good Christian, and understand why she is so, and then she will be everything else that is Good. Men need keep no Spies on a Woman's Conduct, need have no Fear of her Vertue, or so much as of her Prudence and Caution, were but a due Sense of true Honour and Vertue awaken'd in her; were her Reason excited and prepared to consider the Sophistry of those Temptations which would persuade her from her Duty; and were she put in a way to know that it is both her Wisdom and Interest to observe it: she would then duly examine and weigh all the Circumstances, the Good and Evil of a married State, and not be surprized with unforeseen Inconveniences, and either never consent to be a Wife, or make a good one when she does. This would show her what Human Nature *is*, as well as what it *ought* to be, and teach her not only what she may justly expect, but what she must be content with; would enable her to cure some Faults, and patiently to suffer what she cannot cure."³¹

To forestall new objections and to answer those already made, Mary Astell discusses the chief reasons for the opposition to the education of women. "The philosophical lady," too wise for her husband and too uncomfortable

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-115.

for her associates, had long been a figure in English satire, and has not yet been relegated to the limbo of unfor-gotten ideas. Lady Masham in *Thoughts on Education* gives a statement even more vivid than Mary Astell's of the prevalent fear that education would prevent a woman's chance of marriage by separating her from the normal type of marriageable women, a fear that still prevails in some circles. Mary Astell's judgment on the question is penetrating.

“But some sage Persons may, perhaps object, that were Women allow'd to improve themselves, and not, amongst other Discouragements, driven back by the wise Jests and Scoffs that are put upon a Woman of Sense or Learning, a Philosophical Lady, as she is call'd by way of Ridicule,—they would be too wise, and too good for the Men: I grant it, for vicious and foolish Men. Nor is it to be wonder'd that He is afraid he should not be able to Govern them were their Understandings improv'd, who is resolv'd not to take too much Pains with his own. But these, 'tis to be hoped, are no very considerable Number, the Foolish at least; and therefore this is so far from being an Argument against Womens Improvement, that it is a strong one for it, if we do but suppose the Men to be as capable of Improvement as the Women; but much more, if, according to Tradition, we believe they have greater Capacities. This, if any thing, would stir them up to be what they ought, and not permit them to waste their Time and abuse their Faculties in the Service of their irregular Appetites and unreasonable Desires, and so let poor contemptible Women, who have been their Slaves, excel them in all that is truly excellent.

“Besides, it were ridiculous to suppose, that a Woman, were she ever so much improv'd, could come near the top-

ping Genius of the Men, and therefore why should they envy or discourage her? Strength of Mind goes along with Strength of Body, and 'tis only for some odd Accidents which Philosophers have not yet thought worth while to enquire into, that the sturdiest Porter is not the wisest Man. As therefore the Men have the Power in their Hands, so there's no Dispute of their having the Brains to manage it! Can we suppose there is such a Thing as good Judgment and Sense upon Earth, if it is not to be found among them: Do not they, generally speaking, do all the great Actions and considerable Business of this World, and leave that of the next to the Women? . . . Justice and Injustice are administered by their Hands, Courts and Schools are fill'd with these Sages; 'tis Men who dispute for Truth, as well as Men who argue against it: Histories are writ by them; they recount each other's great Exploits, and have always done so. All famous Arts have their Original from Men, even from the Invention of Guns, to the Mystery of good Eating. And to shew that nothing is beneath their Care, any more than above their Reach, they have brought *Gaming* to an Art and Science, and a more Profitable and Honourable one too, than any of those that us'd to be call'd *Liberal*."³²

In her answer to another objection raised against the education of woman, Mary Astell made a reply, which, had she not been held back by her feeling for marriage as a divine institution, might have led her into the radicalism of later writers on the subject, although all the time she seems to have had in mind the conventional marriage, not the ideal type to which she is pointing the way.

"Again, it may be said, If a Wife's Case be as it is here represented, it is not good for a Woman to marry, and so there's an End of the Human Race. But this is no

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 117-121.

fair Consequence, for all that can justly be inferr'd from hence, is, that a Woman has no mighty Obligations to the Man who makes Love to her; she has no Reason to be fond of being a Wife, or to reckon it a Piece of Preferment when she is taken to be a Man's Upper-Servant, — it is no Advantage to her in this World; if rightly manag'd it may prove one as to the next. For she who marries purely to do good, to educate Souls for Heaven, who can be so truly mortified as to lay aside her own Will and Desires, to pay such an intire Submission for Life, to one whom she cannot be sure will always deserve it, does certainly perform a more Heroick Action than all the famous Masculine Heroes can boast of, she suffers a continual Martyrdom to bring Glory to God, and Benefit to Mankind; which Consideration, indeed, may carry her through all Difficulties, I know not what else can, and engage her to Love him who proves perhaps so much worse than a Brute, as to make this condition yet more grievous than it needed to be. She has need of a strong Reason, of a truly Christian and well-temper'd Spirit, of all the Assistance the best Education can give her, and ought to have some good Assurance of her own Firmness and Virtue, who ventures on such a Trial, and for this Reason 'tis less to be wonder'd at that Women marry off in haste, for perhaps if they took Time to consider and reflect upon it, they seldom would marry.³³

In conclusion, Mary Astell refuses to conclude and leaves the reader to draw from the facts presented, whatever inferences he may, but adds a comment as to the effect she expects her pamphlet to have on certain classes of men and women.

“Perhaps I've said more than most Men will thank me for; I cannot help it, for how much soever I may be their

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

Friend and humble Servant, I am more a Friend to Truth. Truth is strong, and some time or other will prevail. . . . If they have usurp'd, I love Justice too much, to wish Success and Continuance to Usurpations, which, though submitted to out of Prudence, and for Quietness sake, yet leave everybody free to regain their lawful Right whenever they have Power and Opportunity. I don't say that Tyranny *ought*, but we find in *Fact*, that it provokes the Oppress'd to throw off even a lawful Yoke that fits too heavy: And if he who is freely elected, after all his fair Promises, and the fine Hopes he rais'd, proves a Tyrant, the Consideration that he was one's own Choice, will not render one more Submissive and Patient, but, I fear, more Refractory.”³⁴

“As to the Female Reader, I hope she will allow I've endeavored to do her Justice: not betray'd her Cause as her Advocates usually do, under Pretence of defending it. . . . And if she infers from what has been said, that Marriage is a very happy State for Men, if they think fit to make it so; that they govern the World, they have Prescription on their Side; Women are too weak to dispute it with them: therefore they, as all other Governors, are most, if not only, accountable for what's amiss, for whether other Governments in their Original, were or were not confer'd according to the Merit of the Person, yet certainly in this Case, if Heaven has appointed the Man to govern, it has Qualified him for it: So far I agree with her: But if she goes on to infer, that therefore, if a Man has not these Qualifications, where is his Right? That if he misemploys, he abuses it? And if she abuses, according to modern Deduction, he forfeits it, I must leave her

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

there. A peaceable Woman, indeed, will not carry it so far, she will neither question her Husband's Right, nor his Fitness to govern, but how? Not as an absolute Lord and Master, with an arbitrary and tyrannical Sway, but as Reason governs and conducts a Man, by proposing what is just and fit. And the Man who acts according to that Wisdom he assumes, who would have that Superiority he pretends to, acknowledged just, will receive no Injury by anything that has been offered here. A Woman will value Him the more who is so wise and good, when she discerns how much he excels the rest of his noble Sex; the less he requires, the more will he merit that Esteem and Deference, which those who are so forward to exact, seem conscious they don't deserve. So then Man's Prerogative is not at all infring'd, whilst the Woman's Privileges are secured.”³⁵

In a few pages added to the pamphlet some time later Mary Astell states that, since writing the essay, she has come to believe, through seeing the folly of many women, that husbands have not a life of perfect ease. “When I made these Reflections I was of Opinion, that the Case of married Women, in comparison of that of their Husbands, was not a little hard and unequal. But as the World now goes, I am apt to think that a Husband is in no desirable Situation, his Honour is in his Wife's keeping, and what Man of Honour can be satisfied with the Conduct which the Licentiousness of the Age not only permits, but would endeavor to authorize as a Part of good Breeding?”³⁶

The *Reflections on Marriage* was only one of many pamphlets on the same subject, some humorous or satirical, some ethnological, some legal and some ecclesiastical, but of those mentioned in the *Term Catalogues* between

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-127.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

1697 and 1709 it is the only one having economic significance, the most modern presentation of marriage from a woman's standpoint, until the time of Mary Wollstonecraft. The three editions published between 1700 and 1706 testify to the immediate acceptance it received, and the fourth edition of 1730 shows that the interest survived up to the time of Mary Astell's death.

In a preface published in the edition of 1706 and repeated as an appendix to the edition of 1730, Mary Astell calls attention to the fact that her work had received the compliment of having its authorship claimed by a gentleman whom she does not name, and, on the other hand, that it had aroused much opposition. She answered numerous objections made to her plea for women, by showing that her pamphlet was not intended to arouse sedition among them, since she had urged women already married to be submissive. She did not accept the theory of the *Natural Inferiority*³⁷ of woman advanced against her argument; that is, she would not accept the thesis that every man is superior to every woman, but that some women are superior to some men is as evident as that some men are superior to other men.

Nor would she accept Biblical authority for the subjection of women. The statements of Scripture, she believed should be taken in relation to the customs of the times, since they were not intended for the settlement of modern disputes, where reason should guide the decision, but to give to man the points peculiar to revelation. It is custom

³⁷ Mary Astell is evidently answering the pamphlet by William Nichols, D.D. *The Duty of Inferiors towards their superiors in five practical Discourses shewing 1. The Duty of Subjects to the Princes. 2. The Duty of Children to their Parents. 3. The Duty of Servants to their Masters. 4. The Duty of Wives to their Husbands. 5. The Duty of Parishioners and the Laity to their Pastors and Clergy, etc.*, 1701.

that has put woman into subjection. God created her with a rational soul, nor can the apostle's words (Cor. XI) be used as proof to the contrary, for "God makes Man the head of Woman as God is the head of Christ, who, as is shown by the form of Baptism, are Coequal." St. Paul, in spite of some passages difficult to explain, perhaps because of references to points no longer known to-day, says: "The Man is not without the Woman nor the Woman without the Man, but all Things are of God." Such a statement indicates mutual relation between the sexes and a reciprocal dependence. "We do not find that any Man thinks the worse of his own Understanding because another has superior Power, or concludes himself less capable of a Post of Honour and Authority because he is not prefer'd to it."³⁸ She therefore concludes that the Bible does not teach the subjection of women.

She is not unwilling to regard man as the head of the family, "since private families as well as empires need a court of last resort." Yet why is absolute sovereignty necessary in a family, if not in a state? Not all governors are by virtue of their position declared more intelligent than their subjects. For many years men have had the advantages in the question of pre-eminence. Boys are carefully educated and encouraged by hopes of "Fame, of Title, Authority, Power and Riches." The girls on the contrary "are restrain'd, frown'd upon, and beat, not *for* but *from* the Muses; Laughter and Ridicule that never-failing Scare-Crow, is set up to drive them from the Tree of Knowledge. But if, in spite of all Difficulties, Nature prevails, and they can't be kept so ignorant as their Masters would have them, they are star'd upon as Monsters, censur'd, envied, and every way discouraged, or, at the best, they have the Fate the Proverb assigns

³⁸ *Reflections*, p. 148.

them: *Vertue is prais'd and starv'd.* And therefore, since the coarsest Materials need the most Curing, as every Workman can inform you, and the worst Ground the most elaborate Culture, it undeniably follows, that Mens Understandings are superior to Womens, for, after many Years Study and Experience, they become wise and learned, and Women are not Born so.”³⁹

Yet even if men are conceded the position of power and authority in marriage, the question as to the unmarried women still remains. “Only let me beg to be inform’d to whom we poor Fatherless Maids, and Widows who have lost their Masters, owe Subjection. It can’t be to all Men in general, unless all Men were agreed to give the same Commands; Do we then fall as Strays, to the first who finds us? By the Maxims of some Men, and the Conduct of some Women one would think so.”⁴⁰

In satirical vein again, Mary Astell claims she in no way urges women to break their chains; they are too much divided to unite on an insurrection and for the most part love their submission. “She’s a Fool,” therefore, “who would attempt their Deliverance or Improvement. No, let them enjoy the great Honour and Felicity of their tame, submissive and depending Temper! Let the Men applaud, and let them glory in this wonderful Humility! Let them receive the Flatteries and Grimaces of the other Sex, live unenvied by their own, and be as much belov’d as one such Woman can afford to love another! Let them enjoy the Glory of treading in the Footsteps of their Predecessors, and of having the Prudence to avoid that audacious attempt of soaring beyond their Sphere! Let them Huswife or Play, Dress and be pretty entertaining Company! Or, which is better, relieve the Poor to ease their own Compassions, read pious Books, say their Prayers,

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 172-173.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

and go to Church, because they have been taught and us'd to do so, without being able to give a better Reason for their Faith and Practice! Let them not by any means aspire to being Women of Understanding, because no Man can endure a Woman of Superior Sense, or would treat a reasonable Woman civilly, but that he thinks he stands on higher Ground, and, that she is so wise as to make Exceptions in his Favour, and to take her Measures by his Directions; they may pretend to Sense, indeed, since meer Pretences only render one the more ridiculous! Let them, in short, be what is call'd *very* Women, for this is most acceptable to all sorts of Men; or let them aim at the Title of *good devout* Women, since Men can bear with this; but let them not judge of the Sex by their own Scantling: For the great Author of Nature and Fountain of all Perfection, never design'd that the Mean and Imperfect, but that the most Compleat and Excellent of his Creatures in every Kind, should be the Standard to the rest.”⁴¹

In conclusion she appeals to the woman highest in authority “that Great Queen who has subdued the Proud and made the pretended Invincible more than once fly before her. . . . if this Glory of her own Sex, and Envy of the other, will not think we need, or does not hold us worthy of the Protection of her ever victorious Arms, and Men have not the Gratitude, for her sake, at least, to do Justice to her Sex, who has been such a universal Benefactress to theirs: Adieu to the Liberties, not of this or that Nation or Region only, but of the Moiety of Mankind! To all the great Things that women might perform, inspir'd by her Example, encouraged by her Smiles, and supported by her Power! To their Discovery of new Worlds for the Exercise of her Goodness, new Sciences

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 176–177.

to publish her Fame, and reducing Nature it self to a Subjection to her Empire! To their destroying those worst of Tyrants Impiety and Immorality, which dare to stalk about even in her own Dominions, and to devour Souls almost within View of her Throne, leaving a Stench behind them scarce to be corrected even by the Incense of her Devotions! To the Women's tracing a new Path to Honour, in which none shall walk but such as scorn to Cringe in order to Rise, and who are Proof both against giving and receiving Flattery! In a Word, to those Halcyon, or, if you will, *Millenium Days*, in which the Wolf and the Lamb shall feed together, and a Tyrannous Domination, which Nature never meant, shall no longer render useless, if not hurtful, the Industry and Understandings of half Mankind.”⁴²

Such a discussion as *Reflections on Marriage* offers opportunity for misinterpretation in its free use of the satirical style, and in its close intermingling of the two styles. Especially in the interpretation of her discussion of the wife's duty of obedience to the husband is there need of care. On one page Mary Astell implies obedience, as a head is necessary to the success of any undertaking; on the next page is a passage, clearly satirical, implying the unworthiness of many men to be given this high position; at times there is an implication that marriage like the government has a legislative assembly, and that tyranny may be put down. Her feeling in regard to marriage seems to be like her feeling for government: a head is necessary, with a position given by divine right, but, unlike her political position, this domestic position is not based upon hereditary right but allows for the rights of the governed.

Implicit in some parts of the essay is the Pauline and

■ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-180.

mediaeval idea of virginity devoted to God as the perfect state; yet Mary Astell believes in marriage as ordained of God, that is, a marriage based upon mutual relations of love and esteem, in which the husband recognizes his wife's right to reason things out for herself and in which she regards him as head of the family.

Though considering marriage as divinely ordained, she sees it also as a social institution, which reason would lead society to continue were there no religious sanctions; though she opposes marrying for money, she realizes the economic basis necessary for marriage. Contrary to the traditional view, however, from her standpoint woman is under no obligation to marry and should not do so unless she can love and respect her husband. If, however, she has married unwisely, her only recourse is by submission to make the unpleasant conditions serve as preparation for the world to come. Mary Astell had advanced beyond Vives, who would have a woman, by personal virtue, lay up goodness for a bad husband, but to her divorce was possible only in the rarest cases; hence the woman unhappily married must endure for righteousness' sake.

The only cure that Mary Astell can see for unhappy marriages is in prevention, by educating the woman, by giving her a training that will develop her own mind and make it possible for her, if she marries, to choose a husband wisely, to live with him on a basis of mutual respect and to educate her children properly. She does not oppose marriage in general, however hard she may believe its demands are upon the woman, nor does she suggest that a woman go outside the home or the educational foundation to receive an education or to use it if she does not marry. The independence she desires for women is not for its own sake, but to make unhappy marriages impossible. Hence Mary Astell draws sharp lines to woman's endeavors.

The appendix to the essay seems, however, to indicate a broader conception of the fields of activity for women, a conception brought about in part, it may be, by Mary Astell's political interests and the widening social services of her friends and herself.

The pamphlet shows the limitations as well as the power of its author. A keenly intellectual woman, strong and intelligent, her satire unembittered by personal experience, her irony unsoftened by the emotions of a happy married life, she writes from observation, not from knowledge. The personal tenderness of her earlier work is lacking, and, while there is an intellectual acknowledgment of the claims of childhood upon both the father and the mother, and a certain intellectual understanding of the disciplinary and educational needs of children, Mary Astell is moved in no such measure by the evils an unsympathetic home relationship brings upon children as by the wrongs suffered by the woman unhappily married.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGIOUS TRACTS

THE day of political and religio-political tracts was not over in 1695, although the bitterness which had characterized the controversies of Milton's time had passed away. With the Restoration period and the entrance of women into definite literary work in court circles, there had grown up a body of women writers among the churchmen and the non-conformists as well as among the irreligious court circle. In some cases these women had confined themselves to the writing of religious poetry, or to the keeping of common place books or religious day books with no attempt at originality; in other cases they had entered directly into the religious discussions of the time or had published political tracts. Elizabeth Rowe represented the type among the non-conformists; Lady Damaris Masham took the latitudinarian viewpoint; Lady Pakington, among the churchmen, was more interested in the side of personal religion; Mrs. Eyre, Lady Pakington's daughter-in-law, shared in the political controversies; and Mary Astell proved a worthy defender of the church in the discussion of the vexing religious problems of the day.

Her first religious work as far as there is any record extant consists of her letters to John Norris, afterwards published by him. These brought her into the philosophical discussions that were being carried on by John Norris, Lady Damaris Masham, and John Locke. The correspondence between John Norris and Mary Astell, containing in all eleven letters, began with her letter

dated St. Matthew's Day, 1693, and continued until June 21, 1694. On July 2, John Norris wrote to Mary Astell requesting that she allow her letters to be published; she acceded to the request, and John Norris's letters and her reply form the preface to the volume. Two letters, one dated August 14, the other dated September 21, were added as an appendix. In the first Mary Astell states some objections that are current against Norris's theory that God is the only efficient cause of our sensations and that he is not only the principal but the sole object of our love; to these objections Norris replies in the second letter. The book is marked "Imprimatur" October 7, 1694, but bears the date 1695. The fact that it contains an advertisement of *The Serious Proposal* helps to date its publication. The first edition is dedicated to Lady Catherine Jones.

In her opening letter Mary Astell accepts Norris's underlying theories but she cannot understand his reason for regarding God as the sole object of our love, that is, for thinking that God is the only efficient cause of our pleasure, since the cause and effect of pain is not explained thereby. If nothing is good but what causes us pleasure, then pain cannot be a good to us; or, on the other side of the dilemma, if the author of our pleasure be the only object of our love, then the author of pain cannot be the object of our love, and God becomes not our good but our aversion. After having expressed his surprise that a women has found the only objection to which his theory is open, Norris shows that God is the author of pain as of all sensations and that Mary Astell's difficulty is in not making the distinction between kinds of good. We love God as the author of relative good, that is, of what is good to us. He is the author of pain as of all other sensations, but wills pain for us only as we are sinners; as his creat-

ures, we must accept his decree. God becomes then the object of our fear lest we should deserve pain, but not of our aversion because pain is inflicted only with justice.

In her reply Mary Astell accepts the general theory of pain, but decides that there must be two kinds; first, a physical pain caused by some outward bodily impression which results in a disagreeable modification of the lower order of the soul, but, as it is for our good, having its source in God, and secondly, an intellectual pain appealing to the higher order of the soul. This kind of pain, arising from sin, cannot come from God. In addition she questions as to what the proper love of God is; she has accepted the doctrine of God as the sole object of man's love, but finds it hard to give God full possession of her heart. "Alas! she writes, "*sensible* Beauty does too often press upon my Heart whilst intelligible is disregarded. For having by Nature a strong Propensity to friendly Love which I have all along encouraged as a good Disposition to virtue—I have contracted such a weakness, I will not say by Nature—but by Habit that it is a very difficult thing for me to love at all without something of Desire. Now, I am loath to abandon all Thoughts of Friendship both because it is one of the brightest virtues and because I have the noblest Designs in it. Fain would I rescue my Sex or at least as many of them as come within my little sphere from that Meanness of Spirit into which the Generality of them are sunk, persuade them to pretend some higher Excellency than a well-chosen Petty-coat, or a fashionable Commode; and not wholly lay out their Time and Care in the Adoration of their Bodies, but bestow a Part of it at least in the Embellishment of their minds, since inward Beauty will last when outward is decayed."¹

¹ *Letters Concerning the Love of God*, pp. 47-49.

Norris replies by showing that she has drawn a false distinction as there are no divisions of the soul into inferior and superior. There are, however, two kinds of pain; the ideas of grief and of bodily pain are distinct. Pain anticipates all thought or reflection, but grief is grounded upon it. Since God alone is able to modify our souls, mental pain, which is a real modification of the soul as is physical pain, is caused by God. Nor will she find it easy, he says, to persuade any one who has felt physical pain that it is not an evil. But if God is the cause of our happiness why can he not be of our misery and thus be the author both of pain and of grief? Both sensible and mental pains are evil and become goods only as a means for avoiding greater evils or for securing greater goods. As such, they come from God, and, since for the sake of our pleasure God gives us pain, he does not merit our hatred for his acts. But a further distinction must be made; mental pain is not the same as sin: pain comes from God; sin does not.

Norris is less helpful in her later difficulty where he teaches that the instructing of friends may be sought *for* our good, but not *as* our good. Yet only long and constant meditation will bring us to the point of truly following out this theory and avoiding the danger of setting our affection too closely upon our friends. Mary Astell acknowledges the weakness of her argument in that she has confused pain and sin. After requesting light on two points, what pleasure is, and how pain, if it be an "uneasie" thought, can anticipate thought, she accedes to Norris's request to communicate her thoughts concerning divine love. The conclusion of the letter becomes a neoplatonic rhapsody on the love of God. In the sixth letter Norris congratulates his correspondent upon having arrived at a suitable conclusion, merely calling her atten-

tion to the fact that, while pain and grief in themselves are evils, they put on the nature of goods when inflicted by God. He cannot comply with her desire for a definition of pleasure, as pleasure must be felt to be understood, but he explains that, when he says that pain is defined as an uneasy thought, he means thought in its widest latitude.

The remaining letters, extending in time from February 1693-4 to June, 1694 express agreement. Both writers discuss the differences in the term love as applied to the love of God and to the love of friends, and conclude the series with further definitions of the love of God.

In 1690 John Norris had published in *Christian Blessedness* some criticisms upon Locke's theories about God's part in man's sensations, and Locke had replied in 1693. Locke had emphasized Norris's point that God never does anything in vain by drawing the conclusion that this statement vitiates Norris's entire argument for occasionalism.

"For if the perception of colours and sounds depended on nothing but the presence of the object affording an occasional cause of God Almighty to exhibit to the mind the idea of figures, colours, and sounds, all that nice and curious structure of those organs is wholly in vain."²

Before the *Letters Concerning the Love of God* were published, Mary Astell wrote a final letter to Norris, summing up the objections she had heard made to the theories discussed therein with especial reference to this one emphasized by Locke, as she wished all difficulties cleared up in the published volume. She states under the two heads the objections that Norris's theory renders a great part of God's workmanship vain and useless, and that it does not comport well with God's majesty. She tries to reconcile the two opposing ideas by questioning

² *The Works of John Locke*, London, 1812, 10 vols. Vol. X, p. 249. *Remarks upon some of Mr. Norris's Books, etc.*

whether there may “not be a *sensible* Congruity between those Powers of the Soul that are employed in sensation and those Objects which occasion it?— Especially since it seems more agreeable to the Majesty of God, and that Order he has established in this World to say that he produces our Sensations *mediately* by his servant Nature than to affirm that he does it immediately, by his own Almighty Power.”³

In his reply, Norris calls her attention to the fact that he has proved in his *Discourse* that bodies are not the cause of the sensations that we feel at their presence but that God only is the cause of them. Sentiment and idea are to be distinguished: one may have an idea of numbers, extension, and geometry, that is, of things distinct from the soul itself, but in anything that requires a modification of the soul, as sensation, God is the true cause, as he has already demonstrated. He warns her again to stick to what she can see clearly and not to reject what is evident for what is obscure. Even were it possible to raise objections to the theory, since reason assures her that is it true, she ought to rest there. For the proof of her second point, he refers her to Malebranche whence his theory of occasionalism is drawn.

The general discussion of the theories of Locke and Norris bore fruit in other pamphlets. Lady Damaris Masham in 1696 published *A Discourse concerning the love of God* intended as a reply to John Norris and Mary Astell, and written probably under the influence of Locke. The change of views shown in this pamphlet would have been painful to Norris had he known her to be its author, for she had once corresponded with him on Platonic love, and in 1690 he had addressed to her *Reflections upon the conduct of human life with reference to the study of learning and*

³ *Letters Concerning the Love of God*, pp. 281-282.

knowledge. She had by this time diverged somewhat from her neoplatonic views toward utilitarianism, probably through the influence of Locke.

Her early training had given her a tolerant attitude coupled with some philosophical knowledge. Her father was Ralph Cudworth, professor of Hebrew at Cambridge and one of the Platonic group there. Among the early friends of the family was John Locke, who had paid tribute to the mental powers of Damaris when she was but a girl of twenty and corresponded with him on Platonic love. In 1685 Damaris Cudworth married Sir Francis Masham. In 1689 Locke had returned from Holland and had become a frequent visitor at the homes of Lady Masham, both in London and in Essex. At the invitation of Sir Francis and Lady Masham in 1691, he took up his residence with them at Essex and made his home there until his death in 1704. Of her ability Locke wrote to Limborth, "The lady herself is so well versed in theological and philosophical studies and of such an original mind that you will not find many men to whom she is not superior in wealth of knowledge and ability to profit by it. Her judgment is excellent, and I know few who can bring such clearness of thought to bear upon the most abstruse subjects, or such capacity for searching through and solving the difficulties. I do not say of most women, but even of most learned men."⁴

The intercourse between the two seems to have re-acted upon both of them. Not only did Lady Masham grow more liberal in her views, but Locke came to understand more clearly the attitude of his opponents. Lady Masham hints at some such change in a letter to Limborth written the year after Locke's death.

"He was born and had finished his studies at a time

⁴ H. Fox Bourne, *Life of Locke*, 1876, 2 vols. Vol. II, p. 213.

when Calvinism was in fashion in England. But these doctrines had come to be little thought of before I came into the world, and Mr. Locke used to speak of the opinions that I had always been accustomed to at Cambridge, even among the clergy there, as something new and strange to him. As, during some years before he went to Holland, he had very little in common with our ecclesiastics, I imagine that the sentiments he found in vogue among you pleased him far more and seemed to him far more reasonable than anything he had been used to hear from English theologians. But whatever the cause, I know that since his return he has always spoken with much affection, not only of his friends in Holland, but also of the whole society of the remonstrants on account of the opinions held by them.”⁵

Lady Masham in the pamphlet *A Discourse concerning the love of God* attacks the philosophy of John Norris because she fears it will cause loss both to morality and to religion; to morality by pretending to attain something beyond in the life of contemplation while morality in this world is forgotten; to religion by trying to persuade men to an impossible practice, thus making religion and its teachers ridiculous both among thinkers who will not accept the ideas set forth and among the weaker minded who will be led to believe that they do not love God as they ought. In their case one of two results must follow, either a devout way of talking with no reason back of it or else wild enthusiasm resulting in retirement from the world to hermitages and monasteries, thus destroying all social relations and leading to popish practices.

The fallacy of Norris’s position, according to Lady Masham, lies in his teaching that man should love only God with desire alone, since, as he states it, every degree

⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 282. Lady M. to Limborth, Sept. 17, 1705.

of desire for any creature is sin, because God, not the creature, is the immediate cause of our sensations. She sees the cause of love in the sensations that the objects themselves arouse, not in God himself who, as Norris believes, "by exhibiting part of his essence to us as the presence of the Creature is himself the immediate author of those pleasing sensations."⁶ Such an hypothesis will fail to appeal to reasonable minds, she argues, since it seems to question the wisdom of God who has furnished man with powers to perceive and to take in sensations; and, since without the love of objects there can be no love for God, because, as he is an invisible being, it is only through his works that man can know him.⁷

In the fourth volume of *Practical Discourses* published in 1698, John Norris replied to this pamphlet apparently under the impression that John Locke was the author. He says "why our ingenious Author has used me thus, I partly guess, though why he should I know no just reason, especially considering the different Treatment he had from me upon a like publick Occasion, which I cannot mention without telling him by the way that as if I had made no reply to his late Treatise. I had not been in his debt, so if I made him a civil one, he is doubly mine,"⁸ and "I was inclining once to have some Remarks upon the particular Arguments to-gether with other incidental pas-sages that run through the bulk of their discourse but a kind and ingenious hand has saved me that pains in relation to Mr. L—."⁹

A later pamphlet of Lady Masham, *Occasional Thoughts in reference to a virtuous Christian life*, 1700, closes her

⁶ *Discourse Concerning the Love of God*, p. 70.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁸ Norris, *Practical Discourses*, 1707, 4 vols. Vol. IV, p. 224.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

part in the controversy and sums up her religious theory. Although it has little bearing on the discussion, it is interesting for its keen discussion of the education of girls, in which it becomes to some extent Locke's *Thoughts on Education* feminized. Mary Astell seems not to have been acquainted with it, but that both women were known for their interest in education is evidenced by the ascription of *The Serious Proposal* to Lady Masham.¹⁰

In 1705 Mary Astell published a work which she intended to be the final statement of her religious theory, *The Christian Religion as Profess'd by a daughter of the Church of England*. Like her other works it was published anonymously, and it was at first ascribed by Lord Stanhope to Mary Astell's Chelsea acquaintance Dean Atterbury.

In the publication of the book, Mary Astell had a triple purpose: to show the bearing of the philosophical thought of the day upon religious belief; to lead women to reason about their beliefs, that, having faith founded upon reason, they might not easily be led into scepticism; and to give a practical statement of the effects of faith upon moral character. To get a satisfactory basis she found it necessary to deal with numerous current books provocative of scepticism such as *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, *The Discourse concerning the Love of God*, and the anonymous *Ladies' Religion*, as well as with false doctrines that had crept into sermons of churchmen themselves, as in Archbishop Tillotson's sermons *On the Sacrifice and Satisfaction of Christ* and *Concerning Divinity and Incarnation*.

In her discussions she attempts to show that the basis of the Christian religion is reasonable. Since reason makes us conscious of our own being and of that of our fellow creatures, it leads us to the belief that there is a God who created being. We conclude that our happiness

¹⁰ Ballard Ms. 41:133.

is in the will of God, and reason and the desire for happiness excite us to worship and to serve him. Our desire for endless happiness carries us still further to a belief in immortality. Natural reason shows us our degeneracy but can not discover to us cause or cure without divine revelation. Consequently, although we are to use our reason on all points within our knowledge, we should accept divine revelation on points for whose proof we need other facts. Yet even these we need not take without evidence for we have the proof of the sublimity of the Scripture, an historical proof such as would lead us to accept other facts.

The Scriptures have been given us to be our guide of life, and we must use our own reason as to their interpretation. This interpreting for ourselves, however, forms no prejudice to lawful authority, since the Scriptures distinctly command obedience to the church and communion with it. Although there are mysteries in the Christian faith beyond our grasp, yet their meaning as expressed in the Scriptures, is intelligible to one who studies carefully to secure it. The later chapters of the pamphlet deal with the morality that reason enjoins: Of Christian Practice, Of our Duties to God, Of our Duties to our Neighbor, Of our Duties to Ourselves and the Conclusion. Here are set forth in clear cut fashion the commonplaces of morality with a slightly mystical and ascetic interpretation.

Although Mary Astell had an admiration for Locke's power of thought and seemed to be conscious of her own mental debt to him, she was far from accepting his ideas. She agrees with the Bishop of Worcester's statement as to Locke's Socinianism in spite of Locke's denial, but she finds more dangerous his basing Christian faith upon two articles alone. As a result she tries to show that the

entire church doctrine is bound up in the articles stated by Locke. She, with John Norris, felt that Locke had a hand in *The Discourse concerning the Love of God* and was more than half inclined to credit to him *The Ladies' Religion*. She does not feel that the idea of God's being the sole object of love is "perplexing the Duties of Morality" as the writer of the *Discourse* had stated, and objects strongly to the deistic theory and to the emphasis upon morality rather than faith to be found in *The Ladies' Religion*.

Even more apologetically she criticizes Archbishop Tillotson. "Nor will it seem a little invidious for one of no consideration to differ from so eminent a Person, much more for a woman to question, tho' ever so modestly, the Authority of such a great Man."¹¹ The Archbishop seems to her to belittle the sacrifice of Christ by making it too much a development of past ideas, a position which to her was a reflection upon the wisdom of God.

The essay has little of the bitterness of some of her other pamphlets; it is serious-minded with an earnestness arising from her intense zeal for the church, but her respect for John Locke's intellectual power and for Archbishop Tillotson's position in the church prevents the caustic reflections of other papers. There is an appeal to women as women to reason out Christian truth for themselves and to live righteously upon the basis of truth discerned. The pamphlet is of interest also as showing the development of Mary Astell's thought. She is still under the influence of Norris's Platonic ideas and of the Cartesian philosophy, but both have been tempered by her further philosophical and logical studies.

In discussing religious theories, Mary Astell takes no cognizance, at least openly, of deism as existing outside

¹¹ *The Christian Religion*, p. 407.

of the church. She recognizes the influence free-thinking, as she calls it, has had on the characters of men and women, but believes both must be reached through church doctrine. Her fear is for the scepticism that is growing up within the church; hence she combats latitudinarianism and deism within. She makes no claim to have read the antideistic writers, such as Leslie and Samuel Clarke, though both come within her period of reading, but her method of proving the existence of a God is along the lines used by Samuel Clarke.

In the next two years traces of her activity in religious thought appear in the well known letter of Dean Atterbury to his friend Smalridge:

“DEAR GEORGE:— I happened about a fort-night ago to dine with Mrs. Astell. She spoke to me of my sermon, and desired me to print it, and after I had given her the proper answers, hinted to me that she would be glad to peruse it. I complied with her (request) and sent her the sermon the next day. Yesternight she returned it with this sheet of remarks which I cannot forbear communicating to you, because I take them to be of an extraordinary nature, considering they come from the pen of a woman. Indeed one would not imagine a woman had written them. There is not an expression that carries the least air of her sex from the beginning to the end of it. She attacks me very home you see, and artfully enough and under pretense of taking my part against other divines who are in Hoadly’s measure. Had she as much good breeding as good sense, she would be perfect: but she has not the decent manner of insinuating what she means, but is now and then a little offensive and shocking in her expressions, which I wonder at, because a civil turn of words, even where the matter is not pleasing is what her sex is always mistress of. She, I think, is wanting in it, but her sensible and natural way of writing makes amends for that defect, if, indeed, anything can make amends for it. I dread to engage her, so I may write a general civil answer to her and leave the rest to an oral conference. Her way of showing the difficulty about swearing to the queen is somewhat singular.”¹²

¹² Rawlinson Ms. D. 198 :91-114.

The extent of Mary Astell's acquaintance is also shown by a letter to Henry Dodwell, the non-juror, and his reply, both as yet unpublished. Among Dodwell's pamphlets concerning the deprived bishops was *A Case in View* published in 1705. By this time Dodwell had begun to feel that the welfare of the church necessitated the return of the non-juring elements. Only one of the deprived bishops was still living, and, because the death of this bishop would soon change the situation, Dodwell, wishing to provide for the contingency before it arrived, argued that, upon the death of the Bishop of Norwich, the non-jurors might return to the jurisdiction of their old sees. He believed the see belonged to the present possessor since as there is no one else to claim the use, God has set His seal upon the bishops in office by allowing them to remain.

The arguments of Dodwell, although strongly bulwarked by examples from the Latin Fathers, did not completely satisfy Mary Astell, and she wrote to him making her criticisms on his theories. Although agreeing with Dodwell in the main, Mary Astell could not accept the doctrine of *Contagion* as she believed he taught it, that is, that the individual should abstain from communion not only under the schismatic bishops, but under all others who had made themselves *accessory* by communion with these bishops, first, because these schismatic bishops were still bishops, not yet having been canonically deprived; then because the church has no other principle of unity than that furnished by the relation of bishop and follower, the individual according to her idea is given too much responsibility in matters beyond his authority for decision, and the greatest precedent of submission to disputable title "without *Danger* of being infected with the usurpers Guilt or partaking in their Sins and that is ye Jewish church tho' the Succession

of the Priesthood (entail'd by God himself) was shamefully broken.”¹³

Dr. Dodwell replies with numerous examples from the Cyprianic age to show that a schismatical bishop was not regarded as filling a see,¹⁴ and that the bishops therefore did contract a contagion of the schism by communing with the schismatic bishops. To her objection that such questions cannot be decided by the generality of the people, Dodwell replies, “there is certainly a mean between the blind obedience required by the Romanists and the assuming confidence practiced by the non-conformists w^{ch} is perfectly inconsistent wth authority, and that mean I take to be this concerning our Authority itself. We must certainly judge and we can judge no otherwise of it but by our private Judgments, in questions previous to Authority w^{ch} are requisite for the finding of it. We must therefore first find the Body to w^{ch} we are to join ourselves before we can find the authority in whose judgments we are to acquiesce as members of the Body.—No Body of men that Disbelieves any Particular of the Primitive Faith can oblige us to be a member of it, let its bishops have never so regular a succession, as far as we can trace them, nor can any Body do so w^{ch} is no Body of Christ, as being set up in opposition to that which is truly so. If therefore the B^{ps} have by their own act cut themselves off from Christ’s Body by communicating with a Body that is divided from his Body it will hence follow that they are no longer qualified to be Bishops by whom we may communicate wth Christ nor consequently are entitled to that deference w^{ch} is truly due to Christ’s legal Representatives.”¹⁵ These views do not to him seem contrary to any statements made in *A Case in View*. Mary Astell’s last point that Christ submitted to disputed titles is waived as having

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 111–112. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

been treated in the *Defence of a Vindication of the Deprived Bishops.*

The letter gives evidence of the respect in which Mary Astell's writings were held by her contemporaries. It begins: "I am glad that Providence has given me this happy opportunity of being known to you: though not unacquainted formerly wth your excellent and ingenious writings, and the rather so, because our Love of our Churches Peace has been on both sides the immediate occasion of it." It is signed "A hearty honourer of your excellent endowments."¹⁶ Dr. Dodwell pays a higher compliment to her mental endowment by quoting Greek. "I give you his own words," he says, "that you may see that I have given his thought exactly, and because I believe you may understand them."¹⁷

The last of Mary Astell's distinctly religious pamphlets was published in 1709. *Bart'lemy Fair or an Enquiry after Wit* had the definite purpose of answering Lord Shaftesbury's *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*, although Mary Astell mistook the real author of the pamphlet. In his discussion Lord Shaftesbury appeals for a moderate religion, a religion based not upon the commands of a government, nor enforced under the direction of a magistrate, not one that had become a panic conveyed by the mutual sympathy and enthusiasm of the multitude, but a religion based firmly upon reason and kept free from all excrescences of melancholy or enthusiasm. To secure this type a freedom of raillery should be allowed that would separate the true from the false and drive away the false by its humor. "And my notion," he says, "is that provided we treat religion with good manners, we can never use too much good humor or examine it with too much freedom and familiarity. For if it be genuine and sincere,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

it will not only stand the proof but thrive and gain advantage from hence: if it be spurious or mixt with any imposture it will be detected and exposed.”¹⁸ He illustrates the effects of such a method by the attack on the French Protestant enthusiasts, who, instead of being honored with a persecution in England, were being made a subject of ridicule in a puppet-show in Bartholomew Fair. Their activities are limited by this method of ridicule, he claims. Shaftesbury does not aim at the rejection of a national church, but any attempt to reduce all manner of belief and of expression of belief to one form seems to him vain, since if reason and philosophy have fair play, superstition will be weakened and rational religion be advanced. Underneath his liberal attitude toward the state church was his deistic philosophy.

The *Letter* was often misunderstood, and, whether interpreted according to the author’s meaning or not, aroused much opposition. Monsieur Le Clerc, the probable French prefacer, saw this as appears from his comment. “The book deserves to be read with attention that he may not be charged with a meaning or design he has not.”¹⁹ Several answers to the anonymous pamphlet were made, among them one by Mary Astell, who plainly believed the pamphlet to be the work of a member of the Kit-Kat Club. The title of her pamphlet, *Bart’lemy Fair or an Enquiry after Wit in which due Respect is had to a Letter Concerning Enthusiasm To my Lord XXX By Mr. Wotton*,²⁰ 1709, took its name from the Bartholomew Fair method of

■ *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*, etc. London, 1708, pp. 49-50.

¹⁹ *Monsieur Le Clerc’s Extracts and Judgment of the Characteristics of Men, Manners and Opinions*, 1712, 3 vols. Vol. 1, p. 4.

²⁰ William Wotton, D.D., 1666-1726, fellow at St. John’s College and in 1705 prebendary of Salisbury is best known for his part in the Phalaris controversy. In 1694 he published *Reflections upon Ancient*

treating enthusiasts suggested by Lord Shaftesbury. Not knowing the author of the pamphlet, Mary Astell was perhaps more caustic in her attack than she would otherwise have been. But back of her distrust of the characters of the supposed authors was her love of country and her loyalty to religion. This rationalistic pamphlet to her held in solution all the elements necessary for the downfall of church and state. Too serious minded to appreciate the elements of humor, she took it more seriously than it was meant.

To Shaftesbury's illustration of Socrates as one who was willing to have his theories put to the test of ridicule, knowing that, having stood the proof, they would appear more solid and just, she replies, "Socrates himself lost his life upon a suggestion that he despised the religion of his Country: and in the heighth of witty times was condemned by the voice of the people, the witty people of Athens, whose voice, without doubt, is esteemed by wits, more divine than the voice of God."²¹ She shows how this method of government by ridicule will not work in practical affairs, by suggesting that the deeds of my Lord, the patron of the pamphleteer, be tested by a Puppet-Show; she applies his suggested use of ridicule to the government by a process of *reductio ad absurdum* or to private affairs in the case of a man who has taken a purse in the best of humor, but who receives treatment far from

and Modern Learning, a reply to Sir William Temple's essay on the same subject. Swift attacked him vigorously in *A Tale of a Tub*. In 1705 Wotton published *A Defense of the Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning—with Observations upon The Tale of a Tub*. Wotton assigned it to Thomas Swift. Mary Astell assumed the pseudonym of William Wotton as she, like him, was opposing the group who fathered *A Tale of a Tub*. His favorable attitude toward the education of women may have been a factor in her choice.

²¹ *Barf'lemy Fair*, p. 24.

humorous, when his act is discovered. This method of testing everything by open ridicule, in order to keep the golden mean, will not work in civil affairs; much less will it work in war. "Doubtless our Letterwriter would deserve the thanks of mankind could he laugh this boisterous method of making war out of countenance, and prevail with the powers of Europe at least, to decide their differences by ridicule. What an entertaining sight would it be to see two Armies drawn up in Battalia, throwing jests and repartees at one another, instead of murdering bullets."²²

More impious, however, than applying the test of wit to the government is the attempt to use such a method upon the Church. In former times a writer who compared the Church to a panther received sharp rebukes, but it is far more blasphemous to represent God under a character like to man. "Nor is it less preposterous and ridiculous to speak of Sacred, August and Great, and for this reason, privileged Subjects, in certain little and unbecoming modes of Speech, than it is to go to Court in Trunk Hose and Farthingales: or to approach the Presence in the Habit of a Harlequin."²³

In such an irreligious age, if the religious man derives from God his power to drive out evil doers, as many still hold, it is his duty to seek to make others religious.²⁴ Even libertines, as the Letter-writer shows, have an innate idea of God of which they cannot rid themselves.²⁵ By these statements and the conventional proofs based upon faith, Mary Astell shows the reality of religion and claims that the burden of proof that there is no God rests with the Letter-writer himself. Those who do not believe must find another working basis for life: their theory of

²² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-89.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

self-moving atoms is ridiculous; that of self-existence, untenable; and Nature is not sufficient explanation. There must be a Deity for creation and a Providence who continues the work; there must be a future state to justify the goodness of God, since men seem to see the result of his justice in this. "Nor will the goodness of God," she concludes, "which the letter would oppose to his justice, bring off the writer and his friends."

Mary Astell touches upon her theory of Church and State, showing how the men who deny a God must deny a government. She makes a more pragmatic application of her religious views in discussing Shaftesbury's idea of ill humor as suiting ill with religion, and traces the spleen and the vapors, common ailments of her sex, to a moral rather than a physical cause, adding, "Nor will she (the woman of the day) ever be free of the vapors, whose time hangs upon her hands, and who is at a loss to determine to what amusement she shall next apply herself."²⁶ The way of escape from such ennui is to live according to reason, that is, according to the Christian belief.

Leaving her ironical style, to which she returns at the end of the book, Mary Astell yields to a Platonic rapture on the joys of religion; then, in a spirit of earnestness that recalls the tenderness toward her youthful friends shown in her letters to John Norris, and the whole-souled devotion to righteousness that appears in her *Christian Religion* she writes to the coming generation:

"And therefore you noble and tender plants who by the blessing of God upon a virtuous Education have hitherto preserved your innocence from being infected with the corruptions of this evil world — who upon this account are the delight and the real glory of your country, to which you owe so much, at least, as not to disappoint

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

those promising hopes it has of your recovering the next generation from that sink of vice and profaneness which this is plunged into, Let no Temptations and Allurements, no customs of the Great or Many, no Examples, no not of your nearest relations, no scoffs, no raillery, out of the mouth of self-condemned criminals, deprive you of that most invaluable treasure, your innocence. To preserve it unspotted is greater than to conquer kingdoms, as requiring more Conduct, Watchfulness, and Prudence, more Courage, Firmness, and Magnanimity. It will render you worthy of the highest honors and set you above all disgraces. It will keep you in perfect friendship with yourselves than whom you cannot have a more faithful, agreeable Friend, nor a more vexatious and dangerous enemy. And what greater approbation can a man enjoy in this present life than the approbation of his own mind, of wise and good men and even of God himself."

It may be the same spirit of righteousness, touched with the acid of her pamphleteering predecessors, that led to her scathing preface *To the Most Illustrious Society of the Kit cats*. This preface seems to have been directed chiefly against Steele and Swift: Swift is attacked directly in the statement "Their prompters are indeed grown above the arts of those who write *Letters to Ladys who creep into Houses and with the Tales of a Tub lead captive silly women.*"²⁷ At times Mary Astell wavers in her feeling as to the authorship of the *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*²⁸ confusing the author and the noble Lord to whom the pamphlet is dedicated. She suggests that writers often dedicate works to themselves to cover anonymity. It seemed not improbable to her that Lord Somers to whom *The Tale of a Tub* was also dedicated and to whom its

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

authorship had been credited, might be guilty of writing the *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*.²⁹

Mary Astell's choice of a pseudonym was a direct reflection upon Swift because Wotton had attacked Swift for the *Tale of a Tub*.³⁰ Swift may have had Mary Astell's pamphlet in mind when he says concerning the treatises written in opposition to the *Tale of a Tub*, "Yet there have been two or three treatises written expressly against it, besides many others that have flirted at it occasionally."³¹ He comments on the fact that the *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* was ascribed to him and disclaims any part in the letter, which he had not read.³² Shaftesbury, on his part, could not have been pleased at the attribution of his work to the one whom he considered "that most detestable author of the *Tale of a Tub*."³³

But the preface did not limit its attack to any individual. The Kit-Kat Club as a whole was marked for satire. The accusations made were the common ones against that group of Whig sympathizers. In 1705 there had appeared a character of the club, attacking vigorously its supposedly anti-religious tendencies. The member of the club, according to the pamphlet, seeks "for Decency in his own House, but Irregularity in that of his god. Cleanliness and Order in the One is Praise-worthy, but Superstition in the Other, and Abundance of Ceremony is to be made use of to the Creature, where Nothing of like nature by his good will should be shown to the Creator. He keeps a Parcel of Sycophant Authors in his Service, because he loves to

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³⁰ *A Complete Key to the Tale of a Tub*, London, 1710. Preface.

³¹ *Ibid.*, An Apology, p. 2.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³³ Benjamin Rand, *The Life, Unpublished Letters and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony Earl of Shaftesbury*, etc., New York, 1900, p. 504.

be flatter'd and imagines himself to have as much wit as he that wrote the *Country Mouse* and the *City Mouse* because they tell him so. — He stands up for Liberty and Property as if he had dar'd fight for it, but had rather the Duke of Marlborough should take that Task off his Hands, for he had much rather judge of Addison's Poetical *History of the Battle of Blenheim*, than be in it, and is fitter to write the second part of the Campaign than to make One.— He talks much tho' he says little, but takes upon him to interfere with Elections, when he has no right to a vote in them. He's for the Church of England as long as the Dissenters share in the Places of Trust that belong to it, and would be nothing more than pleased were all the Bishops to vote against the Bill to prevent *Occasional Conformity*. He's altogether for a new Parliament, because the Old would not part with their Privileges and is against Passive Obedience to Princes but would have us Implicitly submit to be Lorded over by our Fellow-Subjects.”³⁴

Mary Astell repeats the same accusations with an added force. She does not fear to address the members for, as she says, modesty is the least of their virtues, and powerful wit would be a better master of ceremonies. “Oppress'd with so much merit, where shall I begin?” she writes. “Your intellectual and moral endowments, your civil and military virtues, your public and private accomplishments being equally valuable and extraordinary! But your wit and good humour have determined me. That Love to the Public, that study of Universal Good, and to promote the Interest of the whole world, as far as is in your power; your indefatigable Industry to communicate to mankind that perfect freedom you enjoy: this is surely the height of Goodness.”³⁵

³⁴ *A Kit-Kat Club Described*, London, 1705, pp. 4-5.

³⁵ *Bart'lemy Fair*, p. 4.

She accuses members of the club of not paying their debts, of attacking virtuous women, of practicing and encouraging blasphemy, of showing cowardice in not fighting for their country, and of being willing to sacrifice even their souls. Such satirical comments as the following could not be allowed to pass without comment.

“You perfectly understand 'tis true how to maintain your grandeur and noble haughtiness upon just occasions, As when a cluster of Tradesmen, thinking they have an English right to ask their own, intrude into your ante-chambers, if cunning face or fees can procure them that privilege, and not content to pass for humble suitors, will needs show themselves to be troublesome duns: when an ill-bred Fellow Endeavors to protect a wife or daughter or other virtuous woman, from your very civil addresses, your noble courage never fails of being rous'd upon such great provocations and if the vile offender don't sneak out of your way, unarm'd as he is, you know how to whip him thro' the lungs most valiantly! —

“One has not, I confess, heard of your fame from Hochsted, Ramellies, etc., but everybody knows that the world is envious and ungrateful, 'tis to your sedate wisdoms, your healing, vigorous councils, wise debates, and prudent management, that the English name has retrieved or even excelled its glory. You who are our household Gods could not indeed be permitted to leave the Island, and expose your precious lives, your all, upon a foreign shore: wit so consummate as yours knows how to gather them at home at less expense, and to reap the fruits of victory far from the dangers of war. For to speak a bold truth, upon your principles, none but an Englishman, who has more courage than brains, would expose his person, and run the risk of his life in a battle, or in the trenches, did

he not believe to the utmost, and strive to have hope that he shall come off safely. — ”³⁶

This introduction had sufficient power not to be disregarded by those against whom it was directed, and Swift and Steele both answered it by attacks on Mary Astell in the *Tatler*.³⁷

In her reply to these attacks in the Advertisement of the second edition Mary Astell is very moderate, taking them as persecution for righteousness' sake. She does, however, reprove the *Tatler* for including her friends, especially Lady Elizabeth Hastings, in the attack, as not consistent with his policy of recommending honor and virtue. “Nor is it agreeable to the many declarations of our censor, nor to what he would believe was his general purpose, viz., to *recommend Truth, Innocence, Honour, and virtue* to make free with the character of virgins, not less distinguished by their piety than by their quality.”³⁸

She seems not to recognize that Swift was the offender, but puts the blame of the attacks on Steele. Although she is not unconscious of the merits of the *Tatler* (“The *Tatler* tells a tale very agreeably when he pleases, but he has scattered none of his attic salt on this”³⁹) she feels that in this case he is writing as directed by his patron. But she has a good hand to show against his: “One cannot help pitying him to see how he writes against the grain and labours under the Task his noble Benefactors improved. The harmless satyr does not bite: and tho' it shew'd its teeth against the *Proposal to the Ladies* our honest compilator has made an honourable Amends to the Author (I know not what he has to the bookseller.) by trans-

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Preface, pp. 7-9.

³⁷ Cf. Chap. I, pp. 25-27.

³⁸ *Enquiry after Wit*, ed. 1722. Advertisement.

³⁹ *Ibid.* Advertisement.

cribing above an hundred Pages into his *Ladies Library* verbatim: except in a few places which if the Reader takes the Trouble to compare he will not find improved. He has also made satisfaction to Religion in several Papers, particularly in *Tatler* where he treats his friends with proper but coarser Language than the Enquirer thought fit to use."⁴⁰

It is interesting to note that, although time may have had something to do with her attitude, Mary Astell is less resentful because of the personal insults, than because of the attacks on religion. Like the other women of her time, even the looser writers like Aphra Behn and Mrs. Manley, she expected her work, as the work of a woman, to be the object of direct attack. There may have been also some underlying feeling that the bitterness of her words deserved a reply, but it is more likely that she felt she was the prophetess of righteousness.

In the preface to the second edition, she also gives an explanation of her attack on the *Tatler's* grand patron, "so well known by the name of Mouse,"⁴¹ who was suspected of being the author by the friends who asked her to review the pamphlet, and who, she continues to believe, by approving and encouraging the pamphlet, is a partner in the crime.

The progress of Mary Astell's mental development appears in her successive religious pamphlets. As a young woman, in the letters to John Norris, she shows a pliable

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Advertisement. Mary Astell was not alone in her objection to the unaccredited use of her work in *The Ladies Library*. Royston Meredith, publisher of Bishop Taylor's *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*, resented from a financial standpoint Steele's use of Bishop Taylor's ideas, and, upon receiving satisfaction neither from Mr. Tonson nor Mr. Steele, published an account of his wrongs.

⁴¹ The title "Mouse" was given to Lord Halifax because of his share in *The Country Mouse and City Mouse*.

mind, a sympathetic heart, and a keen power of discrimination. The Platonic and mystical appeals to her, and she loses herself in its mazes. She accepts Norris's neoplatonism and his philosophy based upon Malebranche's explanation of the Cartesian dualism. There is no bitterness nor satire in her presentation: but neither is needed, for she writes to a sympathetic listener. With the developing of her mind and her wider study, the tone of her writing changes. She passes through her period of political and religious controversy, following her adversaries in the prevailing method of religious pamphleteering. She reads philosophy and history, as well as the controversial pamphlets of the day. The desire for reason, so predominant in the age, becomes in her the search for a reasonable basis on which to establish her Christian faith, a basis clear and simple enough to be presented to women as a foundation for their belief. To this end she studies Descartes's method and Locke's theories. Her best religious pamphlet thus becomes eclectic, based, unconsciously to her in many cases, upon what she has read. Descartes's rules of reasoning become the foundation of her method. His philosophy, however, is accepted in the form in which Malebranche carried it out; Platonic rhapsody occasionally appears, but all are tempered by a staunch faith in the purity and the stability of the church. By the time of her last pamphlet, *An Enquiry after Wit*, her indignation at the deism and the irreligion of the day had brought into her religious writings a more bitter spirit.

CHAPTER V

POLITICAL PAMPHLETS

PROBLEMS of church and state were so intermingled in the days of Queen Anne that a writer of religious pamphlets was almost necessarily a sharer in political discussions as well. To this rule Mary Astell was no exception, as, in addition to writing purely religious pamphlets, she entered into the controversy brought about by the question of occasional conformity. In 1662 the final Act of Uniformity was passed and, according to report, two thousand ministers were ejected from their livings on St. Bartholomew's Day of the same year. Various other disability acts followed, such as the Corporation and Test Acts of 1673. Upon the accession of William III in 1689 the Toleration Act was passed, but, to the disappointment of the king and the dissenting interests, it gave only partial relief. A dissenter by taking oaths of supremacy and allegiance and by making the declaration against transubstantiation was freed from the statutes enforcing church attendance but was still deprived of the privilege of holding civil and military offices.

By 1697, although the Corporation and Test Acts of 1673 still remained in force, many non-conformists had been elected to prominent civil positions. As they had fulfilled the law in regard to taking communion with the church of England, they were allowed to hold office. Thus the class of occasional conformists arose. No open objection was made to the practice by either party until 1697, when Sir Humphrey Edwin, a presbyterian elected Lord

Mayor of London, attended both the dissenting and the church of England services on a single Sunday and had his regalia of office carried before him to the dissenting meeting-house. His action was attacked by high church men and non-conformists, as well as by the wits of the day. One of the earliest tracts in the controversy was Defoe's *An Enquiry into the Occasional Conformity of Dissenters*, published early in 1698, a pamphlet opposing any conformity on the part of dissenters. In 1701 the same situation arose in connection with Sir Thomas Abney, Lord Mayor of London, and was met by Defoe with a republication of his tract; instead of the preface to the Lord Mayor, however, it contained one addressed to Mr. Howe, the pastor of the dissenting congregation to which Sir Thomas Abney belonged.

By 1702 a bill against occasional conformity was being projected by the Tories as a political measure. It was introduced November 4, 1702, and, although much more stringent than the Corporation Act of 1661, was passed by the House of Commons. The amendments by the upper house were not accepted by the Commons and the measure was lost. Meanwhile fanaticism had been aroused among high church men of the type of Sacheverell. During the discussion in 1702, Defoe published his famous *Shortest Way with the Dissenters*. This was followed shortly by his brief explanation of its meaning and by his *More Short Ways with the Dissenters* in 1704, with numerous other tracts on the same topic during the period. To the *Shortest Way with the Dissenters* replies were made by approving high church men and disapproving dissenters. Even when the hoax was discovered and Defoe was paying the penalty, the replies continued.

In 1703, Rev. James Owen, a dissenting minister at Shrewsbury, took the side of the occasional conformists

in his pamphlet *Moderation a Virtue; or the Occasional Conformist Justified*. Replies to this pamphlet were made from all standpoints. Defoe defended the sincerity of the dissenters in his reply of 1703, Leslie wrote two pamphlets from the high church standpoint, and Mary Astell continued the discussion in 1704 with *Moderation truly Stated*. In her reply to Owen she shows her familiarity with all the pamphlets mentioned, as well as with Dr. Davenant's *Essays on Peace and War* published in 1704, which Defoe had discussed in *The Sincerity of the Dissenters Vindicated* 1703, and to which she replied in the preface to *Moderation truly Stated*. She also took occasion to attack Defoe's *The Shortest Way* and *More Short Ways* in her pamphlet *A Fair Way with the Dissenters and their Patrons*, etc., 1704. One more political pamphlet, *An Impartial Enquiry into the Cause of Rebellion and Civil War in the Kingdom*, 1704, was her final printed expression of royalist fervor, although her activity did not cease, as she expressed her political views in her two later religious pamphlets and aided Dr. John Walker in securing material for *The Sufferings of the Clergy*.

In the preface to her first political pamphlet, *Moderation truly Stated*, Mary Astell answers Dr. Davenant's pamphlets. Dr. Davenant in his *Essays on Peace at Home and War Abroad* starts with the thesis that the stability of a country is aided by peace at home and war abroad, because with war outside the country's domains, its factions at home must be united for the preservation of the state. Thus pernicious factions (for he takes the side that factions are dangerous) must be removed that unity in the nation may be gained. This aim he expresses in the epistle to the Queen. "'Tis Union at Home must make Your Armies and Your Fleets victorious Abroad and enable Your *Majesty* to hold the Balance of *Europe*, and to

protect the Protestant Interest whereof You are the Head.”¹

He avows himself a strong churchman, a believer in limited monarchy in which the authority of the King and not that of the people is final; yet this monarchy is dependent upon the church for its power. Perhaps, for one who does not believe in the power of the people, he relies too much on the influence good men may have in the state, as his first section on *The Danger of Appealing to the People from their Representatives in Parliament* shows.

The course of his argument is that there should be no factions in the state, but he inconsistently shows when factions may be an advantage. He believes that at times a good man may withdraw from his own party and remain “neuter” or become a member of a “Flying Squadron”; then, if his own party has turned aside from the right, he may join another group for the purpose of improving the state. Men to do this, however, must be of superior judgment and must withdraw from their own parties only when their own opinions become altered and not merely for political advancement. In order that the state may secure secrecy and dispatch in business, it must be united. The duty of the ministers of state and princes then is to heal divisions and to prevent the growth of factions. Davenant explains when this is to be done rather than how, as he does not show what power is to carry out his suggestions. The cure for factions in the kingdom, he says, is for all to unite on some great man, or for the king to reduce parties by the approval of the good, since a part of the people will always remain untainted by evil. That this is merely the statement of his approval of one faction Davenant does not seem to consider. The king can

¹ *Essays upon Peace at Home and War Abroad*. Part I. By Charles D'Avenant, LL.D., London, 1704. The Epistle Dedicatory.

assure this unity by toleration and by keeping liberty of conscience among his subjects. Davenant argues that a successful state must be founded upon religion. Though, at times, the state may have seemed irreligious, yet so strong was the feeling that "they who desir'd to rise in the World, if they had no true Piety, were obliged at least to take upon 'em its' Appearance; so that it was not held in Derision by the great Ones in such a Degree as utterly to deprave the Manners of the Common People." There have been troubles within the church itself due to irreligion; there have been sects formed which in changes of government are likely to unite with political parties against the state; the church, however, will stand if it is upheld by the principles of the sovereign.

Since the church of England doctrine is the purest and seems to agree with the English type of government, it is the duty of the English rulers to uphold it, since "the Regal Authority has no other solid Basis to rest upon but the Church."² Although this is true, yet "the Piety of Princes, and their care of the establish'd Religion, ought never to raise a Spirit of Persecution in those who are favor'd and countenanc'd."³ At this point Davenant's statements are so liberal that, were they consistent and sincere, he would rank as a leader of his generation in toleration. He says: "As one Side deserves Favour, the others have a Right to Protection as Subjects, and as Men; not to have their Consciences constrain'd, perhaps they have a natural Right which human Laws are not to alter.

"But some who are fully persuaded in their Minds that they maintain the Cause of God, and his true Religion are apt to think they can never carry it on with too high a Hand, and so are brought to deviate from the Doctrine of their sacred Master who came into the World to teach

² *Ibid.*, p. 232.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

the Ways of Peace.”⁴ Unfortunately for the later acceptance of his argument, Davenant does not keep to this high plane of thought.

He desires toleration, not for the sake of abstract justice as Locke and Bishop Burnet argued for it, or as his statements just quoted would imply, but as a matter of policy because it is necessary to maintain the state. The maintaining of such an act, he argues, would set the minds of the people at rest and break up the strict discipline of the dissenting churches by arousing no persecution to unite them; and the members would return to their worldly concerns. Such had been the case under the Huguenot persecution in France, since, when Henry IV⁵ gave them toleration, their numbers decreased. He, however, shut them out from any management of affairs.

The situation in England was such that Davenant felt there was no danger in repealing the laws allowing liberty of conscience, if the dissenters were not led to affect superiority over the established church. Of the real point before the country, the Bill against Occasional Conformity, Davenant makes no direct mention; since he feels that it is not wise to disturb the dissenters. “And thus a Thing perhaps in its own nature indifferent offer’d, or let alone, oppos’d or consented to without any consequence to either side may be so improv’d by their wicked Arts who promote Division as to inflame a Country.”⁶

The dissenters are not many of them high in rank, he thinks, and have not much education; therefore few of them attempt to enter state positions; the conscientious ones not at all, and, no matter what the requirements,

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 233-234.

⁵ Davenant and Mary Astell following him write Henry III for Henry IV.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

the bad ones will be willing to meet them. If the executive power attempts to interfere and refuses to employ those to whom religion is indifferent, such men may decide to remain in their own church and by pretending reformative zeal may get a following large enough to secure the balance of power.

The wisest plan for the country to follow under the circumstances is toleration, leaving the punishment of hypocrisy to God. And the cure of evils is in the hands of good Princes "when their Rule is in the main without Reproach: when they proceed by gentle and not rough Methods, holding their Reigns, however, with a strong and steady Hand, and especially when they take care to remove from warm and angry Minds any Pretence of ranging themselves one Side against the other under the Banners of Religion."⁷

Unfortunately for the success of Dr. Davenant's appeal for toleration and moderation, he had not always taken that side. During the time of King James II he had been made a commissioner of the excise, but had lost his position at the time of the Revolution. During King William's reign he had written books on *Balance of Trade* against the Whig policies when a new East India company was being organized; his *Treatise on Grants and Resumptions*, when the parliament recalled those in Ireland; and his *Collection of Treaties* on the Partition to oppose the ministry. His *Dialogue between Whiglove and Tom Double* had its effect on the parliamentary elections. On the accession of Queen Anne, he was made Secretary to the Union with Scotland and later Inspector General. His change of policy shown in *Essays on Peace and War* is ascribed by his opponents to this rise in favor at court, as he is said to have written the work by the encouragement of Godol-

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 263-264.

phin, and rumor asserted that the Earl of Halifax also had a share in his conversion.

Many replies were made to him. An anonymous pamphlet, listed by Canon Beeching in his recent life of Bishop Atterbury as possibly one of Atterbury's, appeared under the title, *The True Tom Double or an account of Dr. Davenant's late conduct and writings particularly with relation to the XIth section of his Essays on Peace at Home and War abroad, with some Latin Memorandums for the Doctor's use*. The anonymous pamphleteer accuses Dr. Davenant of varying his ideas to suit his ends, especially as to his change of attitude in regard to occasional conformity. "But the nicest Point upon which the Dr. hath been prevail'd with to try his Skill, is *The Bill of Occasional Conformity*.⁸ He had unfortunately been twice an eager Sollicitor for it, and it was Hard, therefore, that he should be put now upon writing against it. He, himself, was so sensible of the Difficulties which attended this Part of the Task, that, if Fame says true, he would fain have gotten Leave to drop it. But the Command was peremptory and prevail'd. Besides if it was known that he had Compos'd such Papers, and should afterward have concealed them from the Public, it would have been imputed rather to his Fears than his Honesty."⁹ This changed attitude gained for him the name of Trimmer, or as the anonymous writer puts it a Doubler, a name derived from the one he had assumed in *Whiglove and Tom Double*.

To Davenant Mary Astell replied in a preface to *Moderation truly Stated*, her pamphlet directed against Owen's *Moderation a Virtue*. To show her consistent devotion to her cause as against Davenant's *doubling* tendencies, she chose the pseudonym Tom Single. The main part of her

⁸ H. C. Beeching, *Francis Atterbury*, London, 1909, p. XVI.

⁹ *The True Tom Double*, Part I. London, (no date), p. 19.

pamphlet was already written when his appeared. "I was under some apprehensions when your Book appear'd," she writes, "lest mine should be contrary to the Maxims of such a Master, But upon Perusal, I found to my Comfort we Agree in the main, at least so far as my Understanding admits me into your Politicks." ¹⁰

Their agreement, however, did not prevent her from noting the inconsistencies, not only with her own views, but also with the views that he had previously expressed. She had read carefully all of his essays as well as Tom Double's criticisms. (The reader wonders if Bishop Atterbury were the author of this pamphlet, and if so whether there were any discussion between the two of the work in hand.) She made a list of the inconsistencies, a much larger one, she says, than she has shown in her pamphlet. Then in a skillful manner she wove together the Doctor's opinions with comments of her own so as to bring out the change in his views. Inconsistencies there are in plenty, which Mary Astell never fails to find, and touches with a keen satire; at times, however, the spirit of argument leads her to magnify differences and to read into the context statements that are not there.

She holds consistently to the position that there should be no factions in government, and that there will be none if the sovereignty is given over to the ruler. From her standpoint as a believer in the divine right of kings and in the established church of England as the basis of sound government, she cannot admit toleration any farther than to let well enough alone; she does not of course accept occasional conformity.

In her reply to Dr. Davenant she practically limits herself to his chapter *Of Religion and Liberty of Conscience*. She shows that Davenant and she agree as to the mischief

¹⁰ *Moderation truly Stated*. Prefatory Discourse, p. 1.

of faction, but that he is inconsistent, at one time indicating the need of faction, again decrying it altogether. Mary Astell's statements of the differences here seem stronger than the actual statements made by Dr. Davenant. Both agree as to the need of unity and concord, sense and moderation, but not as to the definition of moderation. Both believe the constitution must not be altered. She, on the contrary, cannot accept Davenant's idea of a "Flying Squadron," because the honest man must always be on one side, that side to her mind being of course the side of the government. Hence also questions of secrecy and dispatch in business may better be left to the Prince, "Provided the People can Trust the Prince, as sure they may when that Prince is entirely English."¹¹

Mary Astell agrees with Davenant, that if faction exists, it should be subdued, but calls attention to the fact that he has neglected to show how. Her own suggestion is hardly more constructive than his, since she trusts everything to the righteousness and good sense of the ruler, who must "let his own Prudence Govern, and not the Artifice or Insolence of any of his Subjects."¹² Both agree that there should be no factions, but argue somewhat beside the point, since to Mary Astell faction consists in "making of a Party in Opposition to the Laws and the Establish'd Government; or else the pursuing of a Publick Good by Unlawful Means."¹³ With this definition she can allow for no difference of opinion as Davenant does, and believes no good men can differ from her opinion unless they lack intelligence.

She also replies to other seeming inconsistencies such as Davenant's suggestion that, in cases of faction, strong remedies and all legal means might become necessary, and that faction might better be dealt with by gentle than by

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. VII.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. X.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. XXVI.

rough remedies. With the keenness that had already won for her the respect and the fear of her opponents, the admiration of her friends, and the bitter satire of her detractors, she finds the lack of power in his arguments, the "peradventures and perhaps" without constructive statesmanship. As she says, "In the mean time, Sir, and to confess my Dulness, which is more than every body will submit to, I am not able to find out what it is you would have us do in relation to Offenders. Shall we Punish them? No, for neither the Princes noble Nature nor Necessary Prudence will allow it. Shall we acquit them? No, not this neither, for total Impunity brings Contempt upon the Laws, and begets a lasting Succession of ill Government. . . . What then are we to do? Must we neither Punish them, nor let them go Unpunish'd? this is a little Extraordinary; and if you would please to inform us, where the Mean lies, or what is Moderation on this Case 'twould be a great Discovery and oblige the World extremely."¹⁴

The discussion of moderation is left to the last as being most important, and then is treated according to one of the literary fashions of the times adopted by many religious controversialists for the sake of adding popular interest to their works. John Nokes and William Styles, representing the moderate church men, engage in a dialogue upon the subject, in which Nokes, weaving together inconsistent statements of Dr. Davenant speaks against the bill opposing occasional conformity, and Styles argues for it. Both use in large measure Dr. Davenant's words and thus show his inconsistencies. As it is always easier to be consistent when arguing for conformity than for moderation, Mary Astell, in the person of Styles, comes out victor. Styles, then turning the words of Dr. Davenant against his side,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. XII.

appeals for the rejection of the bill, because "a Church can never fail to Flourish, when Sovereigns by their own Principles are entirely firm to the Interests and Religion of the Church Establish'd, and consequently are inclined to Countenance those who have the TRUEST ZEAL to support it. And this is the best Policy as well as the Sincerest Religion, since the Regal Authority has no other solid Basis to rest upon but the Church."¹⁵

After the bitterness of the dialogue is over, a lady is introduced to speak for the women as Davenant had mentioned them among the dissenting group and to reprove him for having "in books dedicated to her Majesty" taken upon himself to tell the world that "in this Kingdom no more Skill, no more Policies are requisite, than what may be comprehended by a Woman."¹⁶ "As if," Mary Astell remarks, "there were any Skill, any Policy that a Woman's Understanding could not reach."¹⁷ After this digression of several pages a person of "great candor and temper" enters. As a plain man he hopes to conclude the argument by referring to a method suggested by the extraordinary Dr. Davenant in his late essays. There follows a caustic discussion of one of the weakest points of Dr. Davenant's argument, where he illustrated his point by using the attitude of Henry IV of France toward the Huguenots, in giving them toleration and not requiring conformity, but, says the worthy doctor, "He shut 'em out from the Management of Affairs by a general Care in the Executive Power: he took none of that Persuasion into Familiarity of the Service of his Household. He excluded 'em from all offices of the Crown, the Revenue, Courts of Justice, Governments of Provinces and Places, and from all Employments in the Army."¹⁸ The plain man

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. XLVI.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. LII.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. LII.

¹⁸ *Essays*, pp. 237-238.

speaking for Mary Astell suggests that this is the proper method and, as a result of his words, "The Company were extremely pleas'd with this Expedient and so they broke up, some promis'd to carry it to the Lords and others to the Commons; That if they in their Wisdoms should think fit to tender a Bill to her Majesty to Prevent Occasional Conformity, which is just the same thing as Henry III's [IV's] Method, the Church might know what Obligations She had to Dr. D'Avenant for contributing so much to so good a Work."¹⁹

In her own person Mary Astell then sums up the discussion giving many arguments urged by others against Davenant's position, with reference especially to his change of sides politically. She closes with the words—"It has cost me more Time and Pains to Answer you in the Words of that Famous Author I have so often cited [Davenant himself] than would have serv'd if I had us'd my own. But I do not repent of the Labour, for tho' my Sayings might have been disregarded, his must needs weigh with you and all the World."²⁰

The pamphlet of James Owen, already mentioned as the occasion of Mary Astell's *Moderation truly Stated* may be considered as a fair statement of the occasional conformist side, from the standpoint of the conscientious group to which Baxter and Owen belonged. To men like Defoe, they seemed renegades; to men like Leslie they seemed hypocrites: and the modern student has some difficulty in placing himself in their position sufficiently to give them a fair hearing. James Owen was regarded by them as one of their chief defenders, and, as such, they honored his work.

¹⁹ *Moderation truly Stated*, p. LVIII.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. LXV.

His pamphlet opens with the title page — *Moderation a Virtue, or the Occasional Conformist Justify'd from the Imputation of Hypocrisy; wherein is shown The Antiquity, Catholick Principles, and Advantage of Occasional Conformity to the Church of England; and that Dissenters from the Religion of the state have been employed in most governments under the several following heads.* At once, however, Owen disclaims any attempt to defend those who conform in order to secure office; to him that is a scandalous practice. Just why one should conform, otherwise, is somewhat difficult to discern; but Owen has numerous reasons. “It seems very unaccountable that the Protestant Dissenter’s *Moderation* toward the establish’d *Church*, which was formerly reputed a *Virtue* in ‘em, should be interpreted a *Crime*, when it renders ‘em useful to the *State*; That Occasional Conformity, which they judg’d lawful in a private Capacity should become sinful, when they happen to be advanced to Public Stations: that they should be traduced by a Set of Pamphleteers as Hypocrites and dangerous Enemies of the *Church*, for their Charitable Sentiments of it, and Friendly Approaches to it.”²¹

The first thesis to be established is that occasional conformity is no new thing, for Biblical examples prove the practice justifiable on the ground that John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostles, and Paul, as well as the Jews of the early Christian Church, practiced it. The Jewish Church, herself, had encouraged conformity in the case of heathen kings, who had sacrifices offered for them in the temple at Jerusalem.

The English conformist, in the second place, acts from a religious regard to God. Believing the established church to be a true church and a bulwark against popery, he

²¹ *Moderation a Virtue, or the Occasional Conformist Justify'd from the Imputation of Hypocrisy*, etc. London, 1703, pp. 5-6.

does not feel that he can separate from her entirely; but, because he believes the dissenting churches also are true churches, he must hold communion with them. He does not find in them the liturgy of which he disapproves, but does find better preaching and a more strict discipline.

As this practice of conformity had been a custom before the days of the occasional conformity bill, it is hard to see how the accusation can be made that men are conforming merely for the sake of office, especially as many ministers, among whom is Mr. Baxter, and many persons of both sexes, none of whom expected profit from the practice, have followed it. The third point is that there is very little difference between the two communions, less indeed than in the state church itself, as shown by the debates over the power of Convocation, made necessary by the position of the non-jurors. The points of disagreements on the liturgy, ordination and ceremonies in baptism he dismisses as of little consequence.

He argues for the continuance of the practice because of its good effect upon the government. The employment of dissenters in positions of trust strengthens the state: they have shown a true interest in the established church by opposing popery; they have faithfully served in the armies of the country; and they have shared in the attempts to improve the country's morals. In addition, as the tendency of those who believe in occasional conformity is toward the state church, the practice weakens the dissenters and is thereby an advantage to the church. The failure to pass the bill against occasional conformity was a decided advantage to the country; since, with its passing, all possibility of future union would be over, and the definite cleavage resulting would have weakened the established church and strengthened the moderate dissenters. England's church needs the union with the reformed

churches abroad that is attained through the protestant denominations at home.

That the custom of employing dissenters in nations and governments is no new thing, history has shown. Joseph, Daniel and his companions were dissenters. “ ‘Tis true they [Daniel and his companions] had powerful Enemies at Court, who got a Law made for Uniformity of Worship, by which they hoped to ruin ‘em; but God rescued these Conscientious Dissenters from the fiery Furnace, to the confusion of those who plotted their Destruction.”²² Further examples are quoted from ancient history, with the statement in climax that even in popish countries dissenters have not been forbidden the government. In view of these facts it is a pity that the protestant bodies should not be united against anything that might threaten their destruction.

The spirit of the times was becoming too much excited for the replies to Owen’s work to retain the tone of moderation shown in his pamphlet. Charles Leslie, the non-juror, answered with a vicious pamphlet that immediately ran through several editions, and a flood of other pamphlets followed. To them Owen replied with *Moderation Still a Virtue*, a pamphlet directed chiefly against the anonymous *Occasional Conformity a most Unjustifiable Practice*, and Leslie’s *The Wolf Stripped of his Shepherds Clothing*.

In the preface Owen criticizes the methods of attack used by his antagonists, since the “Opponents divert to other Things, which are beside the Design and the Drift of the Discourse. Some of them violently oppose all Moderation and confound it with Lukewarmness in the Essentials and Vitals of Religion: so the verbose and virulent Author of *Moderation truly stated.*”²³

²² *Moderation a Virtue*, p. 37.

²³ *Moderation still a Virtue in Answer to Several Bitter Pamphlets Especially Two Entitled Occasional Conformity a most Unjustifiable*

The criticism upon Mary Astell's pamphlet is just as to its arguing beside the point, since she did not hold to Owen's definition of moderation. The patient reader who reaches the one hundred and twentieth of the closely printed pages of discussion of Owen's volume of half that length and the sixty-sixth of the still more closely printed pages in opposition to Davenant, accepts, at once, the criticism verbose. "Virulent" in the days of political and religious controversy, must necessarily be a relative term: yet the attempts at a sane presentation and at a judicial attitude in Mary Astell's work, while not entirely successful, are sufficient to make the term "virulent" unjust.

Mary Astell's pamphlet *Moderation truly Stated*, a direct reply to Owen's *Moderation a Virtue*, opens with an attempted Biblical definition of the word Moderation, which is explained to mean, according to Paul's usage, either a contempt of the world or lukewarmness in religion. From these definitions, she draws the conclusion that, "for a Church-man to desire a Dissenter to be *Moderate*, is to desire him to pay a partial Obedience, to halt between two opinions, to be so far a False Friend as to get it in his Power to be more effectually an Enemy. And if Obedience, Order, and Uniformity, the Peace and Safety of the Church be such indifferent things, it were best to give them up all at once, and to make no more ado about them.

"On the other hand, that Moderation the Dissenter desires of the Church is the slackning the Reins of Discipline, the Violation of Order, and Breach of Laws.—Nor can the Dissenter, if he is an honest Man, allow himself to be *Moderate*, for that were according to him, the giving up

Practice, and the Wolf Stripped of His Shepherd's Clothing, etc. By the author of Moderation a Virtue. London, 1704. Preface, p. 11.

what he takes to be the *Cause of God*, and a parting tamely with the Reformation and Purity of religion.”²⁴

In criticism of Owen’s statement that Biblical precedents can be found in plenty, both of good and evil, she accuses him of misinterpretation and turns some of his conclusions rather amusingly back upon him — notably the illustration of Naaman, whom Owen had used as an example of occasional conformity, but according to Mary Astell, “when the Duty of his place carried him into the house of Rimmon, and he bow’d himself there, the good Man had the Conscience to ask God’s Pardon for the little harmless Compliance, which he would not pretend to justify. He was convinc’d, it seems, that the Religious Worship of the *Israelites* was the only true Worship, but he was loath to quit a profitable convenient Place; who can blame him? and therefore he hop’d that a little *Occasional Conformity* might be dispens’d with.”²⁵

Elijah refused to let pass the refusing to communicate regularly, in the question, “Why halt ye between two opinions?” Korah and his company were for separate assemblies and purer worship. — “Nor was Korah’s party despicable; they appear too numerous to be suppress’d and too great to be disobliged.” Hezekiah, in his own time, was “in a certain Author’s phrase, a *narrow-spirited zealot*, making *fierce opposition to Occasional Conformity*. For he remov’d the High Places, supprest all Separate Congregations, even where Incense was offered to the Lord, as well as where it was offer’d to idols.”²⁶ Thus through eight pages of illustrations Mary Astell overthrows the value of Owen’s Biblical illustrations. The reader, far removed from the heat of controversy and un-

²⁴ *Moderation truly Stated*, p. 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

accustomed to find his precedents so definitely before him, still takes an intellectual enjoyment in the contest of wits. The instance of the Samaritan woman is perhaps Mary Astell's best illustration. The Samartians were dissenters, she says, descendants of Nehemiah's good friends, "who had very plausible pretences for their Way of Worship, even the same with our Author's *Precedents and Antiquity*, their very women being taught to alledge them; though I think we'd as good let this Instance drop, since our Saviour's reply to the Woman's Question, makes not much for the Credit of those Dissenters. For he tells her *they worship'd they knew not what*, and that *Salvation was of the Jews*, the Church that GOD himself had Established."²⁷

Turning from precedent as proof of the justness of occasional conformity, Mary Astell argues that no government can be wisely carried on by any men except those who are satisfied with it. These she holds cannot be the occasional conformists, who may be well affected toward the civil government, but cannot be toward the ecclesiastical, upon which she believes the civil is based.

In spite of the fact that Owen had insisted that his argument did not cover the case of the hypocritical conformist, Mary Astell attempts to show the impossibility of a man's conforming without his being a hypocrite. To this point, Owen rightly objected in his second pamphlet, stating that Mary Astell was arguing beside the point.

The arguments against Owen's points as to the justice of a separate establishment are much more interesting to Mary Astell than the practical effects of the existing conditions on the political situation. She inquires why if there be between the dissenters and the church such an agreement as Owen states, they separated originally, since, if the separation were justified, then the present plea for

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

moderation might easily be acceded to; otherwise the separation should be given up. But she argues plausibly that there are causes oftentimes that are not reasons; for, if the motives are not those of reason and conscience, then the charges of hypocrisy and of searching for secular preferment hold against them. The designs of the dissenters she believes to be power, preferment, and their own establishment. To prove these charges true, she quotes from Mr. Calamy's *Abridgment of Baxter*. Her inability to look at a subject from other than the established church point of view, leads her to argue in a circle in stating that all acts which tend visibly to the ruin of the church must be bad, and must show bad intention. If the dissenters have been friends to the church of England and good subjects to their ruler, when it was in their power to be otherwise, then their separation may be justifiable. But can they, by their principles, have this loyalty to their church and their king? As readily disproving the latter point, Mary Astell refers her reader to *The Church's Eleventh Persecution*, the account of the clergy who were turned out of their livings. The resulting conclusion is that "considering the Time that these Histories take in you will find that the Dissenters have made pretty good use of their Time and Opportunities, and are not so much behindhand with the Papists, in Peaceableness and Loyalty, and other good Qualities."²⁸

But "God was pleas'd indeed to Restore it in a Wonderful Manner, by a Revolution that was truly His own Work, that was as just as in its Foundation, as it was extraordinary in its Progress, which could be justifi'd by Principles as well as excus'd by Necessity. For when the Royal Party were at the lowest, and all their Loyal Attempts had been baffled, God was pleased to turn the Hearts of

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

the People toward *David* their king, and to convince them by Oppressions they had suffered under their Fellow-subjects, that the *Little Finger* of an usurp'd Power is heavier than the *Loins* of a Lawful Prince.

“And upon this Happy Revolution, the Government which was then Restor'd with the King, might in all probability and Humanly speaking, have been secur'd beyond the Fear of Danger, had not either the Good Nature of *King Charles II* or some false Maxim which obtained, prevail'd with him, not only to pardon His and the Nation's Enemies (this every good Christian and good Englishman sincerely desir'd) but even to treat them as Friends to Promote and Trust them. Whereby he not only gave his Enemies Opportunity to revive the Old Game, but which was worse, left the Crown destitute of Friends. For tho' the Loyal Party had many virtues and had given noble Testimony of their Fidelity, yet they were but Men, and thought themselves no longer Oblig'd to hazard all that was dear to them for a Crown that had so little Consideration of their services, and made no Distinction but to their Disadvantage, between their Merit and the Crimes of the Disloyal.”²⁹

Owen had said that “in the greatest extremity of the Church, under King James they [the Dissenters] joined with her.” This Mary Astell feels was not proved by the protestant willingness to accept the results of the removing of the test. Here, in spite of her loyalty to the king, she can find no praise for James II. Church is higher than state in her mind. As to the position of the dissenters under William and Mary, “When these worthy patriots, I say, had brought about the late Revolution the Dissenters came in very readily and sincerely for they had their Reasons, I do not pretend to judge how well these

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Reasons squar'd with the interest of the *Church of England*."³⁰ All this revolution might have been avoided, she believes, had the dissenters not joined with the papists, and now they are trying to find a place for themselves in a new government.

As she puts it, "We need not trace the Dissenters Behaviour any further only there wants a good Reason why they made such a Bustle upon her Majestie's most Happy and *seasonable* Accession to the Throne, and swarm with so many Pamphlets about our Ears."³¹

All these seem to be sufficient proofs that the dissenters have not been good subjects to the prince and friends to the church of England when it was to their interest to do otherwise. But men may go away from the right under strong temptation; hence it is advisable to learn whether their principles will allow them to be friends to the constitution, to see whether they may return to its support when the temptation is over. Proof of this is given through thirty pages of quotations from history and statute book, usually from the works of the dissenters themselves showing their opposition to church and state, for, to a loyalist such as Mary Astell was, opposition to one meant opposition to both. That many of these speeches were not accepted by a large majority of dissenters; that many were uttered in the heat of political argument; that in sixty years, for many quotations are from the debates of 1642, men may have changed opinions, has no weight with Mary Astell in her quotations. Nor does she regard the context. The strength of her argument lies in the historical method she pursues in going back to original sources. She calls attention to the lack of toleration shown by the dissenting bodies when they were in power, to the disloyalty to king and constitution expressed by the author

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

of *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, to the regicide speeches justifying the regicides in their subversion of the constitution. Nor do these dissenting bodies show greater respect to parliaments than to kings; for they believe the rights were given parliament by the people themselves. The conclusion then is evident. It is not the king to whom these bodies are opposed but the constitution. Such says Mary Astell is the effect in practice of the charitable sentiments of the dissenter, of his friendly approaches to the church, and of his little peculiarities which, according to Owen, should not be a bar to his serving the government.³²

In conclusion, Mary Astell expresses her conviction that the dissenters are separating from the church, not for reasons of conscience, but for political purposes.³³ Toleration, she believes, should therefore be given only in religious matters; for the dissenters from the church might become the leaders of a faction opposed to the government, especially since it is not liberty of conscience that they desire, but an opportunity to gain power.

The pamphlet closes with the usual eulogy on Queen Anne; "since it is so much for Her Majesty's Service and Honour that all Contentions should cease and that as the Reformation was compleated in the Reign of Her Glorious Predecessor Queen *Elizabeth*, so Unity both in Church and State may be the Blessing that Posterity shall derive from the more Glorious Reign of Queen Anne."³⁴

In a postscript to *A Fair Way with the Dissenters*, Mary Astell comments on Owen's second pamphlet, *Moderation Still a Virtue*. She feels that the pamphlet is a repetition of her arguments, not a reply to them. As readers unfortunately do not often take the pains to make compar-

³² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

isons, she says she follows the usual example of writers, the force of whose argument lies only in their assurance, and she says the last word.

"Our Author has an admirable way of dispatching his Opposers; those who take no notice of what is not to the purpose, he says *do not answer him*; those who reply to every shadow of an Argument that is offered for his Cause by himself or others, he tells you are verbose. But he did wisely in over-looking *Moderation truly stated*, for to have consider'd it would have lost him one half of his Book. And it is very true that several Pages are *Verbose and Virulent*, for they are taken up in answering the Dissenters Arguments against Schism and Toleration in their own Words, and their Virulency against the Government in Church and State as by Law established. There you may find that those expressions about Schism, which our Author is so offended at *p. 21*, are the very words of Mr. *Edwards* the Presbyterian.

"I should be too verbose, did I reckon up all our Author's Mistakes and Disingenuities."³⁵

Defoe's clear but brutal satire, *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, reproducing in its tone the attitude of the most rabid "Highflyers," brought many attacks upon him when the object of his pamphlet was understood: for his merciless putting into words of the political and commercial ideas back of much of the religious argument of the day was more than the high church party could stand. It was not until 1704 that Mary Astell, at the request of friends, who by this time were regarding her as a redoubtable champion of the church, discussed *The Shortest Way* and *More Short Ways* in a curiously contradictory pamphlet by far the weakest of her publications. She is conscious of Defoe's satire and yet, with the severity of one lacking a

³⁵ *Fair Way with Dissenters*, p. 24.

sense of humor, she replies half seriously to his suggested method for dealing with dissenters with the curious thesis that "to strike at the root of dissenting interests neither hurts the consciences, the persons nor the estates of Dissenters."³⁶ After formulating a long series of questions arising from the pamphlets she concludes "that what the Dissenters desire is evidently to bring all opposers to truckle to them. It becomes the duty, then, of all churchmen to lay open the design of the Dissenters, thus doing the greatest possible service to them by preserving public peace, by restraining them from persecution, and by preventing the destruction that would come to them in this world and in the next."³⁷ Her loyalty and her religious fervor have in this pamphlet overbalanced her reason.

The same year there fell into Mary Astell's hands the sermon preached by Dr. White Kennett, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, on January 31, 1703-4, the day of the fast for the Martyrdom of Charles I. The occasion was a complicated one to a man who recognized the growing power of the dissenting interests and had something of a sympathy with them. Dr. White Kennett seems to have realized the dilemma in which he was placed; he must praise the king and condemn the execution, without offending the parties concerned in the deed. Whether or not these aims were in his own mind, his sermon very cleverly avoids the main issue. His thesis is that the main cause of the Rebellion was the French alliance of Charles I which aroused fears of popery, and led to jealousy, oppression, and illegal power, all these tending to the growth of profaneness and immorality, and thus producing the hypocrisy and perfidiousness that accomplished the scandal of killing Charles I.³⁸ None of these things, how-

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁸ *Sermon*, p. 4.

ever, were to be laid to the charge of the king; he was a loyal churchman but came under the suspicion of popery. The English people by nature would never suffer itself to be oppressed; and the king, with no evil design, fell under the suspicions of the people who laid to his charge the hard measures under which they labored. He answered for the account with his life.³⁹

The sermon aroused opposition: Defoe defended Dr. Kennett in two tracts and Mary Astell replied in her last political pamphlet *An Impartial Enquiry into the Cause of Rebellion and Civil War in this Kingdom*. This pamphlet has the weaknesses of a partisan discussion, and of a partisan discussion based upon premises already rejected by large bodies of the people, since, although their falsity had not yet been acknowledged by the non-jurors, they had been proved false by the very acceptance of William of Orange as king. Mary Astell holds completely to the theory of the divine right of kings and to the corollaries deducible from this theory; yet she is not a non-juror. She criticizes Dr. White Kennett severely for not stating fairly the causes of the civil wars, which, following her authority, Lord Clarendon's *History*, she bases upon the factions within the state.⁴⁰ To her mind the preacher was at fault in not entirely exonerating the king, God's anointed.⁴¹ Even had the causes stated been true, the present danger is no longer popery, she thinks, but factions among the people, which were the true cause of the death of the king, and which still afford danger to the government and to religion. The dangerous doctrine of popery, that of putting some power higher than royalty, still exists

³⁹ *Sermon*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ *An Impartial Enquiry*, pp. 38-39.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-56.

among the dissenters, and among them lies the future danger to the church and state.

Although the publication of *An Impartial Inquiry* closed Mary Astell's public career as a political writer, her private activity did not cease. When Dr. John Walker was collecting material for his book *The Sufferings of the Clergy* she assisted him. There is in the Bodleian a letter addressed to her under the date of March 30, 1705, from N. Ellison of Newcastle, written in reply to a request from her as to information concerning the sufferings of the clergy at Newcastle while they were deprived of their livings. In her letter to Dr. Walker giving this material, she enclosed the history of John Squire of St. Leonard, Shoreditch. This material Dr. Walker used in his account with the comment, "And that only which distinguishes *Mr. Squire's* case from the rest of them is, that the *Particulars of his Sufferings happen to be thus preserved*, and their coming to my Hand (which I cannot forbear to mention upon this Occasion) is owing to the most ingenious Mrs. Astell; to whom I beg Leave in this Place to pay my Thanks for that great Favour."⁴²

Through her political and religious writings of Mary Astell had become favorably known among churchmen for her defense of religion. She had received wide-spread praise for a part of her work that is entirely lost sight of to-day, in the changed aspect of the matters discussed and in the more universal appeal of some of her contemporaries. In addition to those already mentioned were Dr. Walker, Dean Atterbury, who commended her wit rather than her discretion, Henry Dodwell, who quoted Greek in his letters out of compliment to her knowledge, and John Norris, who

⁴² *An attempt towards Recovering an Account of the Numbers and Sufferings of the Clergy of the Church of England, etc.* By John Walker, M.A., London, 1714. Part II, p. 177a.

praised her for her "most exalted and seraphic strains." Dr. George Hickes and Dr. Charlett, Master of University College were also interested in her writings, as the following letter gives proof.

"Decem. 9, 1704.

"Hon^d Master:

You will shortly see Published a book against the Presbyterians dedicated to the House of Lords. Another against Occasional Communion by way of Appeal to the Cath. Church for the first Centurys and the Church of England since the Reformation, and you may now assure yourself that Mrs. Astell is the Author of the other Book against Occasional Communion which we justly admired so much.

"I am Sir, with all respect

"Your most obliged

"humble servant

"Geo. Hickes."⁴³

Dr. Daniel Waterland referred a young theological student to her comment on one of Tillotson's sermons, which he says "is modestly and judiciously examined by an ingenious Lady in a very good book entitled 'The Religion of a Church of England Woman.'" ⁴⁴

Her admirers seem to have been more impressed with her theological than with her historical ability, as was natural both from the tendencies of the time and from the power of her work. She was not unskillful, however, as compared with her contemporaries, in pamphleteering, and she seems to have thought as logically as her false premises and the argumentative spirit of the times would allow. She was, however, widely read in the history of both sides of the discussions and depended often upon first hand parliamentary reports for her material. In spite of the basic falsity of her position from the modern viewpoint,

■ Ballard Ms. 62 : 85.

"*The Works of the Rev. Daniel Waterland-D.D., etc.* Oxford, 1823, 10 vols. Vol. VI, p. 319 n.

she gives an impression of reasonableness and rationality often lacking in the political and religious discussions of her contemporaries. Although seldom presenting new material, she re-states the old with a vigor and sincerity that justified her friends in regarding her as a suitable defender of the church.

CHAPTER VI

CHARACTER AND INFLUENCE

ALTHOUGH Mary Astell's chief interest was in the education of women, the variety of subjects she discussed and the different groups of people she knew show a catholic taste. Her interests lay, however, more in speculative writing than in pure literature. She had read widely in political and religious controversy and had a fair acquaintance with current philosophy. The "great Mr. Locke" she knew and respected, however much she might refuse to accept his opinions. She had dared to oppose Swift, Steele, and Defoe, but she commented only on their political writings and activities, as their best literary work was not done until she had ceased to write. Politically she differed from Milton, whom she regarded as "a better poet than divine or politician"; yet his blank verse moved her. In general it is the controversial that attracts her attention, especially when her opposition is aroused as by Dryden's *The Hind and the Panther* and Prior and Montagu's *Hind and Panther Transversed*.¹

Perhaps as an inheritance from Vives, perhaps from her own observation as to their bad effects, she was opposed to romances and plays for women, and she had read with interest Jeremy Collier's attack on the stage, "a very Learned and Ingenious tract writ against this growing evil." From an educational standpoint, also, she had followed the controversy as to ancient and modern learning, where she ranged herself with the moderns.

¹ *An Enquiry after Wit*, p. 73.

In her estimate of writers of her own sex, her judgment is over-balanced by her pride in them as women. She compliments Madam Dacier and Madam Scudéry, forgetting, in her zeal, her opposition to plays and romances. The Matchless Orinda receives her unqualified approval, as showing what a woman can do if she makes the effort, and Lady Mary Montagu is praised for her masculine intelligence. It is curious that Mary Astell leaves unnoticed such a writer as Anne Schurman, whose pamphlets were then available in an English translation, and whose point of view and general attitude toward life was so closely allied to her own.

It is difficult to give a general criticism of the style of Mary Astell; the first pamphlets differ from the later ones; the political, from the religious. In the early writings, the style, always smooth and rounded becomes eloquent in its sincerity when expressing deep religious feeling. There is a regular rhythm, a recurring rise and fall in its periodicity and sonorousness, often reminiscent of Milton's time. The *Reflections on Marriage*, a pamphlet of the middle period, is simpler, more ejaculatory, with clear-cut statements and balanced structure. In its concluding passages it too rises into swelling cadences. The later pamphlets are more involved, although in *The Christian Religion*, Mary Astell returns somewhat to the emotional style of her earlier pamphlets. In the ironic she is most successful. Keen and trenchant from the first, her work later becomes hard and bitter. It is too heavy for wit, although the turns of expression are sometimes very happy, as, "A Woman may put on the whole armour of God without degenerating into a masculine temper."² There is an attractive use of figures, commonplace often, but given a new turn by their placing. "Nothing is so lovely," she writes, "as a Life

² *Christian Religion*, p. 103.

that's all of a Piece the same even Thread running through it from beginning to end."³

Mary Astell's style of presentation and her choice of subject matter show several traits of her character, her religious sentiment, her deep love for the church, her intensity of feeling drawn out by any opposition to either church or state, and the isolation of viewpoint that comes to a pioneer. Most of her biographers have emphasized the austerity of her nature. In this she is often misjudged. The character of her later years is the one that has come down to us, with its oddities and austerities accentuated by the pens of satirists. Lady Arabella Stuart has given much the same portrait, when, hardened by opposition and disappointment and by the misunderstanding and the lack of sympathy of her associates, Mary Astell withdrew into herself. A more attractive picture is the one she presents in the preface to *Letters Concerning the Love of God*, where with a mother's tenderness she is brooding over the waywardness of the women about her, before repulses and discouragements have narrowed her sympathies. Her reticence and her womanly fear that the purpose of her letters to Dr. Norris should be misunderstood are far different from the caustic statements of *An Enquiry after Wit*.

Mary Astell's independence of thought and action has given to her the credit of being the "first English suffragette," a title that can in no way be applied to her in the usual meaning of the term. She had no conception of woman as a factor in politics except through the use of intrigue, of which she entirely disapproved. In fact her belief in the reigning sovereign was such that she would give but limited opportunity for men in political affairs.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

It was not until her latest pamphlet, *Christian Religion*, in 1705 that she touched upon the question. She says:

“Your Ladiship it’s like will wonder why I say so much in a matter wherein women are supposed to be unconcerned. My reason is because the Divines who write *Letters* and *Explain Principles* to *Ladies* insist upon the rest, and because a little practice of the world will convince us, that Ladies are as grand Politicians and every whit as Intriguing as any Patriot of the Good-old-cause. Perhaps because the gentleness of their temper makes them fitter to insinuate and gain proselytes, or that being less suspected they may be apter to get and to convey Intelligence and are therefore made the tools of crafty and designing demagogues. This made me think it not improper to take Notice in this Matter. That if Ladies will needs be Politicians, they may not build upon a rotten and Unchristian Foundation. A Foundation destructive of all government in general, leaving no sort of settled quiet any longer than till a party can be formed strong enough to overthrow it. How busie looks and grand concern about that Bill and t’other Promotion, how whispers and cabals, eternal disputes and restless solicitations, with all the equipage of Modern Politicians, become the Ladies, I have not skill to determine. But if there be anything ridiculous in it, I had rather leave the observation to the Men as being both more proper for their Wit and more agreeable to their Inclination.”⁴

A few pages farther on she writes more moderately, with a little prophecy of the future: “the sphere allotted to us women, who are subjects, allows us no room to serve our country either with our Counsel or our Lives. We have no Authority to Preach virtue or to Punish vice, as we have not the Guilt of Establishing Iniquity by Law,

⁴ *Christian Religion*, pp. 176-178.

neither can we execute Judgment and Justice. And since we are not allow'd a share in the Honourable offices in the commonwealth, we ought to be ashamed and scorn to drudge in the mean trades of Faction and Sedition.”⁵

It may not be entirely unfair to lay claim to Mary Astell, with Ballard, as the first defender of “the rights and privileges of her sex,” and there is often excuse for much of her caustic satire because of the attitude of the period toward women. Under the existing social conditions, the position of woman in relation to men not of her family brought with it something of a problem in her own life as well as in the lives of those around her. Mary Astell had no patience with the theory of Platonic friendship, which by this time had degenerated into coarse love. She had, however, corresponded widely with men interested in church affairs, and she confesses that she found it a help at times to ask a man’s advice upon business or religious problems, but that social conditions made natural relations of friendship between men and women practically impossible.⁶ She was too independent to let fear of criticism shut her off entirely from society, and her home was open to her friends of either sex.

Mary Astell belongs more to this century than to her own, and would find to-day the support she lacked in her own time. Yet, even then, she did not stand alone. She was the spokeswoman of a body of women interested in the social and educational ideas of the day not in the diletante fashion of the *Femmes Savantes* or their English imitators, but with an attempt to grasp problems and to change conditions that pointed to the modern attitude of sociologists. How much her ideas influenced the next generation it is impossible to state, since it is dangerous to attempt to trace streams of influence when the influence

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220.

is not that of an individual, but of the developing thought of an age. Lady Masham and Elizabeth Elstob sought education for girls, but neither saw so fully as did Mary Astell its bearing on life. That the women of the next generation were indebted to her in some measure Lady Mary Montagu shows clearly. Sarah Chapone, the mother-in-law of Hester Chapone, had Mary Astell's pamphlets in her library and was interested in their contents. Catherine Talbot, Mrs. Delaney, who, as Mrs. Pendarves, was the friend and benefactor of Elizabeth Elstob and the Chapones may have formed a connecting link between the work of Mary Astell and that of the Blue-stockings, but no one until Mary Wollstonecraft so caught the modern spirit. Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, it is true, wanted to establish a "college" for girls, but the general attitude of the Blue-stockings toward education was that of Mrs. Barbauld, who, in spite of her own experience in securing an education, refused to take charge of the proposed school, because she believed herself unfitted to teach music, dancing, and embroidery, the accomplishments of a lady, which could be acquired better under the paternal roof.

Interesting as such a relation would be, there seems no proof that Mary Astell's writings had any direct influence on Mary Wollstonecraft. Suffice it to say that both were laboring to bring in a new era for women: the one, a sincere, earnest daughter of the church, sought education, freedom of reason and, where needful, economic independence for women, who thus might have an opportunity to know and to practice righteousness. Mary Astell's idea of freedom was the breaking away from convention only as it hampered the development of the religious ideal. To Mary Wollstonecraft freedom had a far different meaning. A liberal in religion and the product of a hundred years more of thought, she was unhampered by tradition

as Mary Astell was not. Her views were based upon personal experience and upon personal wrongs. She asked for more than the prevention of unhappy marriages; she asked for opportunities in education and in labor equal to those of men. Such ideas were merely a carrying out to its logical conclusions of Mary Astell's desire for economic independence.

Mary Astell's originality in thought lies not wholly, as has been seen, in her plan for the education of women. Lettice Falkland had hinted at economic independence; Mary Astell definitely asked for it. Although both had in mind only gentlewomen, this was an advance when even gentlemen had not learned to work. *The Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* suggests that English women should take up sedentary occupations as the Dutch women had done, thus leaving men free to fight. The discussion had only begun. In *The Gentleman's Magazine* of 1739 appeared a letter entitled "A new Method for making Women as useful and as capable of maintaining themselves as the Men are: and consequently preventing their becoming old Maids or taking ill courses. By a Lady," and succeeding issues continued the discussion. It is Mary Astell's presentation of the economic position of women in society and her attempt to show the relation between woman's education and her economic position in marriage that calls attention to her to-day. In this attempt lies her value at present when the grave questions of the vocational education and the political enfranchisement of women are bound up closely with the problems of the economic relation between women's education and marriage, and when Mary Astell's desire for the education of women, carried out beyond the reach of her wildest vision, seems to be finding its fulfillment in women's search for her highest freedom.

APPENDIX I

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

PROBABLY the first contemporary notice of Mary Astell occurs in John Evelyn's *Numismata*, 1697. He says, after enumerating famous English women from Boadicea and Abbess Hilda to Queen Elizabeth and several foreign women, "Among these Royal and Illustrious Ladies, we do not forget the late Dutchess of Newcastle either for her learning, — or love of learning: nor for both, Mrs. Philips and our Sappho, Mrs. Behn: Mrs. Makins, the learned sister of the Learned Dr. Pell, nor without the highest ingratitudo for the satisfaction I still receive by what I read of Madam Astall's of the most sublime."¹

References to her work were made in contemporary literature as already quoted, but no further biographical notice appeared until the edition of *Bayle's General Dictionary* published in 1738. Although no article is devoted to her work, mention is made of her under John Norris in a note to the discussion of *Letters Concerning the Love of God*. The comment is as follows: "The Lady whose letters are published in this collection was Mrs. Astell, who wrote among other books, *A serious proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their true and greatest interest* in two parts in 12 mo, *Some Reflections upon Marriage occasioned by The Duke and Duchess of Mazarine's Case* in 8 vo, and *The Christian Religion as Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England* in 8 vo. Bishop Atterbury's opinion will appear from the following letter." Then follows the

¹ *Numismata*, p. 265.

letter of Bishop Atterbury to Smalridge concerning Mary Astell's trenchant comments on Bishop Atterbury's sermon against Hoadly.² It was quoted from the manuscript in the possession of Thomas Birch,³ and, since the time of its publication, it has appeared as one of the stable facts of Mary Astell's biography.

John Wilford's *Memorials and Characters Together with the Lives of Divers Eminent and Worthy Persons*, 1741, contains no mention of her, although including the varied group of dissenters, high church woman with catholic tendencies, and church woman with non-juring and methodist connections, Lady Elizabeth Hastings, Susannah Hopton, and Elizabeth Rowe.

Ballard, the protagonist in the play for women's honor, felt the same difficulty in getting an audience for his books on women that the women themselves had been conscious of earlier, and because of which they had published anonymously. Even his friends saw no place for such a book, and the difficulties of its sale were evidence that they judged more accurately than he the current lack of interest in women's intellectual achievement. He, at least, has the honor of standing, not indeed as the writer of *The Legend of Good Women*, but as the writer who gave the impulse to the long series of books on great women. In reply to Ballard's inquiries, one of his friends, Mr. Welton, objected to the undertaking, saying that there were no learned ladies, that even Madam Dacier was a mere pedant.⁴ This criticism disturbed Ballard, but, upon meditation and consultation with others, he decided to continue his work. This he discusses in a letter to the brother of the Mr. Welton mentioned above. "For, if we have not above one or two Ladys worthy to be taken notice of, I must consequently be a very stupid Blockhead to put myself to so

² Chap. IV, p. 116. ³ Ballard Ms. 37:49. ⁴ Ballard Ms. 42:17.

much expense and to lavish away so much Time and Pains to so little Purpose. But the more I reflected on what I had done, the more I was established in a favourable opinion of it. It was no small Satisfaction and Pleasure to me to recollect that most of the Lady's whose memoirs I am collecting have been applauded or extolled by the pens of some of the greatest or most learned men that this nation can boast of."

" . . . I hear of several Persons who are pleased to perstringe me (and) my Illustrious Train of Learned and worthy Ladies, or who have assurance enough to affirm that women were never intended or designed to be made acquainted with the Arts or Sciences, that 'tis a thing quite out of their sphere . . . and that no person of solidity or judgment would engage himself in such a trifling ridiculous employment. From whence those monopolizers imbibed such unchristian and brutish notions I know not, but, certain it is, the wisest among the Heathens wou'd have abhor'd or detested such vile sentiments." ⁵

Ballard draws consolation from the heathen writers, from Socrates and Aspasia, from Plato's female scholars, and from the assistance Pliny had from his wife. These with Biblical examples encouraged him, until he concludes — "So that upon the whole I cannot for my life conceive how it can possibly be any reproach to me or even to the greatest man living to be engaged in such an undertaking." ⁶

Unfortunately when the book was to be sold, Ballard found a lack of interest wider than he expected. Elizabeth Elstob replied to one of his complaints in a letter of January 16, 1752.

"I am extremely sorry to hear of the disappointments you have met with and for the little success I have had

⁵ Ballard Ms. 42:17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 42:17.

in my endeavors to serve you; this is not an Age to hope for any encouragement to Learning of any kind. For your part I am sorry to tell you the choice you have made for the Honour of the Females was the wrongest subject you could pitch upon. For you can come into no company of Ladies or Gentlemen where you shall not hear an open and vehement exclamation against Learned women, and by those women who read much themselves to what purpose they know best.”⁷

In the Ballard collection of manuscripts in the Bodleian are many interesting estimates and comments made by those to whom Ballard wrote for material for his *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain*. In the course of this gathering of material Ballard managed to revive an interest in the biography and writings of several women, among them Mary Astell. She seems to have been little known by this time, even less than ten years after her death, and her books were somewhat hard to obtain, if Ballard’s difficulties are any criterion. He wrote for information to women who might have known her, and secured some material from Elizabeth Elstob and Mrs. Sarah Chapone.

Such learned men as Richard Rawlinson, antiquarian of Oxford, and Thomas Birch of dictionary fame, gave facts as to the life and writings of Mary Astell. Thomas Rawlins, William Parry and others had their interest sufficiently aroused to cause them to read and discuss her pamphlets. The fulsomeness of their compliments to a writer several years dead was not exceeded by those who praised her during her lifetime.

By 1766 Mary Astell’s name had begun to appear regularly in the books of biography devoted especially to women. *Biographium Foemineum* which appeared that year contained among the *Memoirs of the Most Illustrious*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 43:47.

Ladies of all Ages and Nations who have been eminently distinguished for Magnanimity, Learning, Genius, Virtue, Piety and other excellent endowments, eight pages on Mary Astell. Edward Phillip's *Theatrum Poetarum*, edition of 1765, failed to mention her, but she is included in later editions among modern women along with Anne Bradstreet, Anna Maria Schurman, Aphra Behn, Katherine Philips, and Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle. These were but the forerunners of other biographical dictionaries dealing with women.

The increased interest in feminine affairs aroused in part by Mary Wollstonecraft, in part merely one more stage in woman's intellectual development, brought out a number of books of this kind at the beginning of the nineteenth century, all mentioning Mary Astell and basing the facts of her biography upon Ballard. She has a place in the motley company of the *Eccentric Biography, or Memoirs of Remarkable Female Characters Ancient and Modern Including Actresses, Adventurers, Authoresses, Fortune tellers, Gipsies, Dwarfs, Swindlers and Vagrants*; in Mrs. Pilkington's *Memoirs of celebrated Female Characters*; and in various other "female Biographies" of that character. *The Biographia Britannica* mentions Mary Astell under the article on John Norris. Watt's *Bibliotheca Britannica* gives the most complete bibliography of her works, including, however, *Six Familiar Essays upon Marriage, Crosses in Love and Friendship*, not before ascribed to her and from the style and treatment obviously not her work. Succeeding biographical dictionaries both French and English derive their material from Ballard and from Watt's *Dictionary* and many of them perpetuate the errors of Ballard with no credit to the source. By the middle of the nineteenth century, through the kind offices of the makers of biography, Mary Astell has become a "divine

and a philosopher,"⁸ so well educated in the learned languages that the most difficult authors, Plato, Epictetus, Cicero, and Antonius were as familiar to her as the writings of her own countrymen.⁹ *The Dictionary of National Biography* adds little new material. Articles appear in the *Encyclopedias Britannica* until the last edition which omits her name.

Only within the last few years since the activity of women has turned students back to the pioneers, has the interest come to be in her educational and feminist activity rather than in her personal relation to such writers as Swift, Defoe, and Lady Mary Montagu. Miss McIlquham in an article in *The Westminster Gazette* called attention to some of her works, and Prof. Karl Bülbring in the *Journal of Education* gave the earliest analysis of her position in educational development, showing her failure to formulate new theories. In June 1893 Miss Pattison of Gateshead published an article in *The Pall Mall Gazette*. It adds nothing to the biography of Mary Astell, although material was near at hand in Newcastle. Moreover the history of the time is portrayed from a strong anti-puritan standpoint, and a narrow interpretation of Mary Astell's views is given. Several recent books dealing with different phases of the feminist movement refer to Mary Astell¹⁰ and popular articles, both in England and the United States, are attempting to show her relation to present day movements.

⁸ Hawks, *Pictorial Cyclopaedia*, p. 56.

⁹ Blake, *A General Biographical Dictionary*, p. 67.

¹⁰ Cf. Appendix II, p. 180.

APPENDIX II

AUTHORSHIP OF ESSAY IN DEFENCE OF THE FEMALE SEX

UNTIL recently there has been no question as to the authorship of *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex*.¹ In January 1913 Professor A. H. Upham read at the meeting of the Modern Language Association a paper in which he questioned the ascription to Mary Astell, as the subject matter of the pamphlet seemed to him hardly consistent with her ideas as expressed in her other work, and as the entire tenor of the *Defence* seems more in line with a group of French pamphlets that were having a wide vogue in England at the time. Bibliographical data seem to bear out Professor Upham's contention. In the 1738 edition of Bayle's *General Dictionary* but three pamphlets are enumerated "among other works" and *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* is not one of the three. Ballard mentioned the pamphlet as "a witty piece commonly ascribed to her."² Under the date of January 19, 1739-40, Thomas Rawlins wrote to Ballard, evidently in reply to Ballard's attempt to secure a copy of the book.

"Ye Essay in Defense of ye Female Sex I have not seen. I know Mrs. Astell has published something of ye nature. I shd be glad to see this book and then, I will give you my sentiments upon it.³ A further investigation as to the authorship on the part of Mr. Rawlins brought him this

¹ *The Journal of English and German Philology*. Vol. XII, No. 2, pp. 262-276.

² Ballard, *Memoirs*, p. 449.

³ Ballard, Ms., pp. 41:91.

letter under the date of April 1740 and signed A.B. "The *Essay in defense of the female Sex* has been always thought Mrs. Astell."⁴ A little later, June 1742, Thomas Rawlins desires to secure from Mrs. Chapone "Mrs. Astell's *Proposal to the Ladies* and also her *Essay in defence of the Female Sex.*"

The references in the other bibliographical articles mentioned by Professor Upham have no especial value in determining the authorship of the book, as nearly all follow Ballard merely stating definitely points concerning which the by no means accurate Ballard is in doubt. Watt's *Bibliotheca Britannica* includes the essay but also lists among Mary Astell's works *Six Familiar Essays on Marriage* which is not given previously as hers. There is inaccuracy also in the ascription of *The Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* to a Colonel Hunter. The fact that the *Dictionary of National Biography* omits it proves nothing, for Canon Overton does not give a complete and accurate bibliography, listing *Moderation truly Stated* as *Occasional Communion* 1705, according to the title given it by Ballard, who had not seen the book, and mentioning *Christian Religion* incidentally, in saying that Mary Astell also wrote against Locke, Tillotson, and Dr. White Kennett. *The Enquiry after Wit* is unmentioned. Halket and Lang's *Dictionary of the Anonymous and Pseudonymous Literature of Great Britain*, 1888, ascribes it to Mary Astell but gives no authority for the ascription. The *British Museum Catalogue*, Miss McIlquham in the *Westminster Review*,⁵ and the *Cyclopedie of Education*, are merely following tradition already established. *The Nouvelle Biographie Universelle* going back to Ballard as authority speaks of *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* as an "ouvrage d'une autorité

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:37.

⁵ *Westminster Review*, CLXIX: 444, April, 1898.

contestée.”⁶ The evidence of the bookseller might be prized more highly, but *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* does not appear in the list of books advertised in the 1720 edition of Mary Astell’s *Some Reflections on Marriage*.

A curious edition noted in Welford’s *Men of Mark, Twixt Tine and Tweed* would seem to point to the authorship by someone who would have a reading public in Newcastle. Welford says that an early edition was published there under the title “*An Essay in Defense of the Female Sex Interspersed with Reflections upon Love and Taste Written for the Honour of the Fair Sex* By a Lady, London, Printed for C. Hitch in Paternoster Row and R. Akenhead, jun., at the Globe opposite the Bridge-End. Coffee House, Newcastle.”⁷ This was expanded he says, in 1697, into the third edition in which the character of a beau, etc. was inserted. Miss Hope Dodds of Newcastle who has had access to this edition assures me that it must be a later condensed edition, as it contains a reference to Pope’s *Essay on Criticism* which would fix the date as after 1711. While the publication of one edition in Newcastle would tend toward the ascription to Mary Astell, a copy noted in a volume of the publications of E. Curril, the bookseller, seems to settle the question. In a catalogue of E. Curril’s publications and of second hand books sold after 1741, a copy of the *Defence of the Female Sex* 1696 was listed as written by *Mrs. Drake*,⁸ probably a sister of Dr. James Drake, who attended to the publication of the pamphlet. This ascription is confirmed by a pencil note in the British Museum copy, “By Mrs. Drake,” and seems to establish the pamphlet as not that of Mary Astell.

⁶ *Nouvelle Biographie Universelle*, Vol. III, p. 472.

⁷ Welford, Vol. I, p. 124.

⁸ For this information I am indebted to Prof. Wm. P. Trent of Columbia University.

The student of Mary Astell's work, however much he may realize the difference in point of view between the ideas of that pamphlet and her educational views, is sorry to deprive her of the reputation of its authorship, both because of its modern atmosphere and because of its clever satire. As Professor Upham suggests, it probably belongs to the wide group of English pamphlets published at this period after the style of the French, some translations, some imitations, and some more or less original.

The subject matter of *The Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* is different from that of any of Mary Astell's works. It lacks the religious tone that was so prominent at this period in her writing. The whole discussion is based upon a more free relationship of the sexes than she was likely to approve, as the question at issue is whether or not "the Time an ingenious Gentleman spends in the company of women, may justly be said to be misemploy'd or not?"⁹ Pleasure and profit of the mind are to be the topics of discussion and the point will be made if either one is proved. The discussion as to woman's lack of education is mentioned, the usual curriculum being needle-work, dancing, etc., and language limited to French, but the writer believes this may not be a disadvantage in conversations, where heavier subjects such as religion are to be tabooed, and raillery on questions of love, marriage, etc., to be admitted. Mary Astell had expressed strong opposition to the Platonic relationship, and at the time of the publication of this pamphlet was urging religion as the chief aim of study. Nor was the literature suggested for reading as cultivating conversational powers a type such as she would entirely approve: Shakspere (whom Mary Astell had not mentioned), Otway, Dryden, Etherege, etc., poets from Spenser through Milton, Denham and Suckling, prose from Bacon

⁹ *Essay in Defence of the Female Sex*, p. 6.

to Sir Roger L'Estrange, Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*. The critics, Mr. Dennis and Mr. Rymer, are recommended, but Mary Astell had taken the other side in the stage controversy and had praised Jeremy Collier's opposition to plays. *The Contempt of the Clergy*, recommended as humorous, would hardly appeal to her, nor would she be likely to enjoy the "facetious dialogues of Mr. Brown," and Halifax's *Advice to a Daughter* was distinctly obnoxious to her.

No relation between *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* and any of the French pamphlets has yet been established, but an interesting example of parallel cases exists. In 1672 Poulain de la Barre's *De L'Egalité des deux Sexes Discours Physique et Moral* was published in Paris. With some indebtedness to earlier French discussions, it presented in well-reasoned fashion the theory that, if her disabilities were removed, woman would be equal to man. After showing how woman is able to study mathematics, jurisprudence, and church history, Poulain de la Barre draws the conclusion that a woman who can study such subjects is able to practice them, and advocates for women as liberal positions as those open to men, including ecclesiastical preferment. The English translation *The Woman as Good as the Man, or the Equality of Both Sexes*, 1677, does not seem to have been known to Mary Astell. The power of Poulain de la Barre's pamphlets is somewhat vitiated, and the question as to his serious purpose is raised by the fact that he answered his own pamphlet two years later in *De l'excellence des hommes contre l'égalité des sexes*.

Upon the English translation of Poulain de la Barre's first pamphlet was based an English pamphlet in 1739, *Woman not inferior to man . . . by Sophia a person of Quality*.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Woman not inferior to man: or a short and modest vindication of the natural right of the fair sex to a perfect equality of power, dignity and*

Sophia claims that men are governed by prejudice in their judgments, and reasons from what has been to what will always be. She proves that women are not necessarily inferior to men in capacity, and that women need knowledge as much as men for the understanding of their moral obligations. The fact that women pedants have abused knowledge itself is no reason for withholding it, as men also have suffered from insufficient knowledge of science. So far the points under discussion, common to both these pamphlets, are the ones usual in the discussion of the sex problem in both countries.

The French pamphlet goes further than the common-places of the discussion: it compliments the women who, unmarried, remain in the world as patterns of modesty and Christian piety. Then it claims for woman the full right to a knowledge of all the sciences as a direct out-growth of all the duties incumbent upon her. She is capable of natural philosophy and medicine: the study of law is an outgrowth of her duties as mistress of a home, which duties would also lead to a knowledge of geography. Even a study of canon and secular law is not outside her juris-

esteem with the men. By Sophia a person of Quality. London, 1739.

Man superior to woman: containing a plain confutation of the fallacious arguments of Sophia in her late Treatise, intitled Woman not Inferior to Man, 1739.

Woman's superior excellence over Man or a reply to the author of a late treatise entitled Man superior to Woman. In which the excessive weakness of that Gentleman's answer to Woman not inferior to Man is exposed. London, 1740.

Beauty's Triumph

Part I. *Woman not inferior to Man By Sophia.*

Part II. *Being an attempt to refute Sophia's argument.*

Part III. *Proving Woman superior in excellence to Man, by Sophia.* London, 1757.

diction, for woman has an equal right to happiness with men and hence a right to all knowledge that leads to happiness. The most advanced statement in the pamphlet lies in its assertion of the right of women to preach.

"The Employment which approacheth most to a school-master is that of Pastour or Minister in the Church, and there can be Nothing else but custom shewn which remove women therefrom. They have a spirit as well as we, capable of the Knowledge and love of God, and thereby able to incline others to know and love him. Faith is common to them with us. And the Gospel with the Promises thereof are likewise addressed to them. Charity also comprehends them in its duties: and, if they know how to put in practice the actions thereof, may not they likewise publicly teach its Maxims? Whosoever can preach by Example, from stronger reason can do so by words: And a Woman that should join her Natural Eloquence with the morality of Jesus Christ should be as capable as another, to Exhort, Direct, Correct, Admit into Christian Society, those who deserved, and cut off such who after having submitted themselves thereto, should refuse to observe the rules thereof. And if men were accustomed to see women in a pulpit, they would be no more startled thereat, than the women are at the sight of men."¹¹

Women might govern: they are queens, and "We may easily conclude that if Women are capable to possesse severally all publick authority, they are still more to be sub-ordinate Officers and Ministers: As Vice-Queens, Governants, Secretaries, Counsellors of State and Treasurers."¹² They may even be allowed to judge and to lead armies: in fact women are suited for all employments. Since this is true they must study to make themselves

¹¹ *The Woman, as good as the Man*, pp. 124-125.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 127.

ready. "If their Parlours were turned into Academies, their Entertainments would be Greater, more Solid, and more Pleasing." "They would be admitted into the Entertainments of the Learned and reigne amongst them upon a double Respect. They would enter into the Management of Affairs: Their Husbands would not refuse to abandon to them the Conduct of their Families and to take their Advice in all Things."¹³

The statement as to the public offices open to women Sophia quotes almost verbatim from the English translation of Poulain de la Barre's pamphlet. She is not willing however, to let women into the ministry. "Thus far I insist there is no *science* or *public office* in a state which women are not as much qualified for by nature as the ablest of Men. With regard to divinity, our natural capacity has been restrain'd by a positive law of God: and therefore we know better than to lay claim to what we cou'd not practice without sacrilegious intrusion."¹⁴

How much seriousness of spirit is to be attached to, pamphlets of this type is hard to determine: they are signs of the times, it is true, for the satirist points the way to future development, but it seems as yet unfair to claim them as expressing views of a wronged woman as is done by Miss McIlquham,¹⁵ who believes Sophia to be Lady Mary Montagu, and by those who follow her ascriptions,¹⁶ until authorship and source shall be further investigated and the question be answered as to whether the pamphlet is merely one of the wit combats preceding more serious conflicts or

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-133.

¹⁴ *Woman not inferior to man*, p. 45.

¹⁵ *Westminster Review*. CLXIX: 444, April, 1898.

¹⁶ W. Lyon Blease, *The Emancipation of English Women*, 1910, pp. 43-47. George Elliott Howard, *History of Marriage Institutions*. Chicago, 1912, 3 vols. Vol. III, p. 237. Allene Gregory, *The French Revolution and the English Novelists*, 1915, p. 233.

the opening of the conflict itself. The close reasoning of the Sophia pamphlet and its French original might suggest the latter, although it at once became a part of a series of pamphlets more or less humorous. The answer, *Man Superior to Woman* is humorously intended, but written with a caustic tone that may imply belief in the seriousness of the discussion it is answering.¹⁷ The Sophia pamphlets quote freely from Young and Pope, and would seem to be an adaptation of French method and material to the current satirical discussions on women.

Such a direct borrowing from the French raises some doubt as to the native character of *The Essay in Defence of the Female Sex*, which, as shown by Professor Upham, has an interesting likeness to the French type, and is not by Mary Astell as has generally been supposed. It is being quoted by propagandists and by educational writers as representing the sincere feelings of men and women of the period, regardless of the fact that it may be merely a humorous pamphlet or an academic discussion. Professor Howard so uses it in his discussion of the history of mar-

¹⁷ "Women," says the opposer of Sophia, "conscious of their own Inabilities have cheerfully acknowledged the Authority which Wisdom gives to Men over them, content with the soft dominion which Love secures to them over the *Men*. In a word, the little Glimmering of Reason which Heaven bestowed on them out of Compassion to us, that they might be in some Degree a Sort of Rational Amusement to us, was sufficient to convince them of the justness of their subjection. Nor would the woman enjoy any more the interpretation of her creation. After the creation of man there was still some imperfection in him. The Creator 'therefore extracted from the rest of his Body whatever he found of man, imperfect, and savouring too much of the Animal and confined it to a single Rib,— The Creator, then, took from him this Rib, this Sink of his Defects and shaped it into Woman, little concerned about any Perfections in the Soil but such as immediately tend to the Production of that Noble Fruit for which it was saved from Reprobation.' "

riage institutions,¹⁸ and Professor Taylor takes it even more seriously, regarding it as expressing the feelings of a woman who considers woman as an inferior kind of man, having unlike sexual functions, and who pleads for the higher education of woman on the ground that she will thus become more interesting to man.¹⁹

The entire problem of these pamphlets with a study of the social and intellectual conditions back of them offers a fruitful field for a search into the development of social and intellectual ideals.

■ Howard, *A History of Matrimonial Institutions*, Vol. III, p. 237.

¹⁹ J. Lionel Tayler, *The Nature of Woman*, London, 1912, pp. 11-13.

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To the Truly Honourable Lady The Lady Catherine Jones in due Acknowledgment of her Merits, and in Testimony of that Just and therefore very Great and Unfeigned Veneration which is paid to her Ladiships vertues. These Letters Are most Humbly Dedicated and Presented.

The Book Contains: The Preface. To the Reader. Letter to M. Astell. Reply from M. Astell. Postscript. Letters between M. Astell and J. Norris.]

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[Contents: 1. Preface. 2. Essay. Ballard XLI: 132.

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PAMPHLET ATTRIBUTED TO MARY ASTELL

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[In the British Museum copy after "written by a Lady are penciled the words 'Mrs. Drake.'"]

[Contents: 1. Dedication to Princess Anne of Denmark. 2. Preface. 3. Drake's poem. 4. Essay.]

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[Contents: 1. Dedication to Princess Anne of Denmark. 2. Preface. 3. Poem by J. Drake. 4. Letter from J. Drake. 5. The Lady's Answer. 6. Essay.]

An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex. In a Letter to a Lady written by a Lady. The Fourth Edition. Corrected. London. Printed by S. Butler, next Bernard's Inn in Holborn. MDCCXXI. [Contents: As in third edition.]

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¹ Welford. *Men of Mark.* Vol. I., p. 124.]

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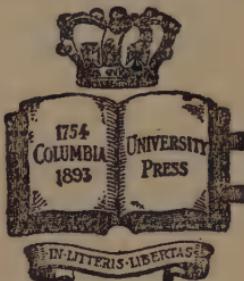
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